Richard Alleva
SCARY MOVIES

COMMONWEAL

A Review of Religion, Politics, and Culture

September 24, 1999

Darwin & God

John Haught

Genesis

1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. 2The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters. 3And God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. 4And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness.

5God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, one day. 6And God said, "Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters."

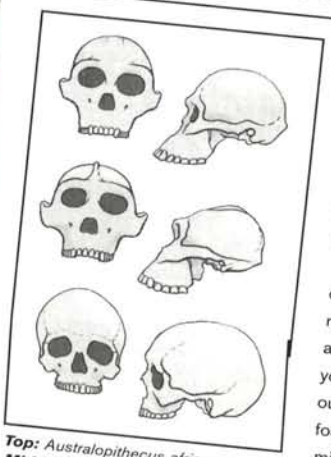
7And God made the firmament and separated the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament. And it was so. 8And God called the firmament Heaven. And there was evening and there was morning, a second day. 9And God said, "Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear." And it was so.

10God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good. 11And God said, "Let the earth put forth vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind, upon the earth." And it was so.

12The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed according to their own kinds, and trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. 13And there was evening and there was morning, a third day.

14And God said, "Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and

Human Evolution: The Missing Link



Top: *Australopithecus africanus.*
Middle: *Australopithecus robustus.*
Bottom: *Homo sapiens.*

In the mid-nineteenth century, arguments between Evolutionists and Creationists turned on the question of a missing link. Undermining the long-accepted doctrine in the West of the Chain of Being, Evolutionists theorized that humans and apes were evolutionary related and that there must have been a link between the species — an extinct primate which would have been ancestor to each; Creationists pointed to the lack of any such fossil remains as proof of the folly of Darwinism. Early evidence of human evolution emerged in 1856 when the first Neanderthal fossil was discovered near Düsseldorf, Germany.

Recognizing that the Neanderthal fossil was of early human remains — that is, not a common ancestor — Eugene Dubois, a young anatomist from Holland, set out in the late 1880s to find an older fossil which would establish the missing link. Reasoning that Europe had been too cold a climate for such ancestors to have lived, Dubois turned toward the tropical region of Southeast Asia for his search. Supported by the Dutch government in Sumatra, he oversaw digs that turned up hundreds of animal and human fossils. Most notable among their finds were a tooth and part of a skull uncovered in 1891, as well as a femur bone the following year. In 1894, Dubois declared that these fossils were of *Pithecanthropus erectus*, constitutin

Eastern Europe after Communism

Adam Szostkiewicz

Daniel Callahan on Health Care

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COMMONWEAL

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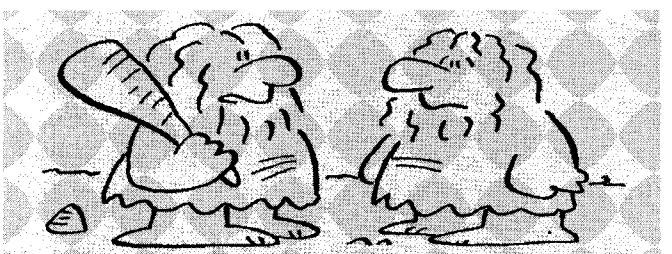

"I'm not against evolution—I just feel that it should be left to the private sector."

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To the Editors

From Olympus, to a poet

My compliments to Carol Hamilton on the presentation of her poem, "Becoming Light" [August 13]. This piece integrated Eurocentric tradition with multicultural metaphor, the cumbersome physical contrasted with carefree ethereal.

The lines, "even as the flesh draws down, flattens...we must levitate, glide across that distance," may be grasped alike by a holy man in India or a Catholic in Kansas. Lyrical ecumenicity takes for granted talent.

I proffer this unsolicited critique in the hope that aspiring poets may persevere. It ought be known that self-appointed critics, like mythic gods, will occasionally give the nod.

WILLIAM DAUENHAUER
Wickliffe, Ohio

Reaching the heights

Recently I asked you to consider publishing my story about my cousin Julia Canny, Irish survivor of Hiroshima. You declined, but I really appreciated the courtesy of your reply. I submitted the article to fourteen publications. Nine were silent, three (including you) replied negatively, one signaled "maybe," and one—the *Western People*, a newspaper serving the west of Ireland—chose to run with it. They even published three of my photographs. The editor wanted to know my fee for the piece. Knowing it would be, at best, in the low hundreds, I played the big shot, telling them to give my honorarium to a charity of their choice. I'm told their favorite charity is Western Care, which will receive the sum of fifty dollars.

So there you have it. I'm now an international reporter, a photojournalist, and a philanthropist. Despite my new eminence, I'm still grateful for the courtesy of your reply. Thanks.

ED MURPHY
Falls Church, Va.

75 COMMONWEAL

1999 marks Commonweal's 75th year of publication. We invite you to celebrate with us...in Chicago:

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Cardinal Francis George & Peter Steinfels
RESPONDENTS
John Noonan, John McGreevy & E.J. Dionne, Jr.

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The one true faith

I subscribed to your periodical in 1950 but canceled my subscription in the early 1990s because I was more and more unhappy with the direction the magazine was taking. Recently, after accepting your offer of a free short-term subscription, I read the issue of August 13 and would like to tell you what I think. It is incomprehensible to me that you could implicitly designate Kevin Doyle as a hero when your writer reports that Doyle quit the Democratic party "because of its unyielding prochoice platform."

The Democratic party in recent years has increased the minimum wage, has tried to give tax benefits to the poor, has fought the huge tax cuts planned by Republicans that would primarily benefit the wealthy, has pushed for more gun control, and has worked to protect Social Security and Medicare and to expand health care to all. The gentleman you praised as "a lawyer with Catholic convictions" has in reality "strained out the gnat and swallowed the camel."

The strongest biblical condemnations have always been directed against those who sin against justice, who deprive the widows and the orphans and the poor of what they need for survival. How can you pat a man on the back for such a disjointed set of values?

WILLIAM J. WIEDNER
Elk Grove, Calif.

From the editors: It was easy. As the article ["Doyle for the Defense"] makes clear, Kevin Doyle's values include a belief that a death-row inmate may need a lawyer for survival, and a conviction that infants in the womb may need an advocate to survive. Without asking him, we suspect Doyle favors tax breaks for the poor, gun control, protection for Social Security and Medicare, a fair tax system, and a boost in the minimum wage. Finally, we have word from a source in a very high place that not all its residents are Democrats.

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Princeton's Gradgrind

In *Hard Times*, Charles Dickens gave us the most memorable, if not the most philosophically nuanced, picture of the moral and spiritual dead ends to which a thoroughgoing utilitarianism leads. "Thomas Gradgrind, sir," Dickens's tragically deluded protagonist describes himself. "A man of realities. A man of facts and calculations. A man who proceeds upon the principle that two and two are four, and nothing over, and who is not to be talked into allowing for anything over....With a rule and a pair of scales, and the multiplication table always in his pocket, sir, ready to weigh and measure any parcel of human nature, and tell you exactly what it comes to. It is a mere question of figures, a case of simple arithmetic."

Gradgrind's rigidly logical efforts to impose his morality of "utility" and the "greatest good for the greatest number" on every aspect of the world, especially to inculcate his children with utilitarianism's fierce denigration of ordinary human affections and moral intuitions, ends in predictable (if satisfying) disaster. In substituting mere rational calculation in the pursuit of pleasure and the avoidance of pain for any more complex notion of human nature and moral agency, Gradgrind dooms his own children to emotional vacancy and ethical cynicism.

Gradgrind's plight comes to mind in the midst of the controversy surrounding the appointment of Australian philosopher Peter Singer to the chair of bioethics at Princeton University. Singer is, of course, a far more sophisticated utilitarian than the satirically drawn Gradgrind. Still, he shares much of Gradgrind's intellectual certainty and evangelical zeal, and the disturbing conclusions Singer reaches by his utilitarian logic rival Gradgrind's reduction of morality to arithmetic.

Singer is best known for his defense of animal rights—indeed for his insistence that, in some instances, human infants have no greater claim to life than do cats or even snails. He labels "specieism" the idea that any human life is intrinsically more valuable than that of other creatures. "Killing a disabled infant is not morally equivalent to killing a person," Singer has written. "Very often it is not wrong at all." With his Princeton appointment, Singer's advocacy of abortion, infanticide, and euthanasia will gain a broader audience, and the "culture of death" an especially nimble defender. Singer has already been profiled flatteringly in the *New Yorker* ("The Dangerous Professor," September 6), where he is quoted pronouncing on the demise of "a two-thousand-year-old system of values—one that had enshrined the sanctity of human life, no matter how compromised."

A pioneer in the field of practical or applied ethics, Singer has written extensively about the conundrums posed by modern medicine at the beginning and the end of life. As a utilitarian, he judges moral actions by their consequences, and specifically by whether suffering will be lessened and happiness increased. In that context, he thinks in some cases it is morally permissible, even necessary, to kill disabled, retarded, or hemophiliac infants. Since infants are not self-conscious or rational they are not "persons," and therefore do not enjoy any strict immunity in utilitarianism's cost vs. benefit ethic. The same measure applies at the end of life. A comatose, terminally ill patient is no longer a "person" in any meaningful sense. If the patient's suffering can be ended and if limited health-care resources can then be directed to greater benefit elsewhere, euthanasia is justified.

Paradoxically, the moral obligation to prevent suffering ties Singer's assault on

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the idea that human life is sacred to his ambitious moralizing about the suffering of the poor. He argues that our obligations to family and friends are not more important than relieving the suffering of distant strangers. In an article in the *New York Times Magazine* (September 5), he contends that Americans have a moral obligation to contribute all their income not needed for "necessities," say, anything over $30,000 a year, to hunger relief. Indeed, he argues that not to do so is the moral equivalent of allowing a child to be killed by a runaway locomotive when you could easily save the child by diverting the train at the mere cost of destroying your car.

Singer's idea may sound compassionate, but it is too simplistic. Beyond question the world's haves can and should do much more for its have-nots. But it is an economic fallacy to think that hunger, which is more often the result of political conflict than lack of resources, could be eliminated by first-world largess. It is an intellectual trick to argue that other moral obligations, to provide for the education of one's own children or to invest in third-world development for example, cannot be rationally defended as long as hunger persists.

Utilitarianism has many flaws, but perhaps its greatest weakness is using only one moral measure to evaluate every human situation and action. As its critics have long pointed out, the reduction of all morality to a mechanical calculus of pleasure or pain also reduces the person doing the calculating to little more than an instrument of the greater good. In other words, there is no logical point at which to stop giving when it comes to abolishing suffering everywhere. Singer's allowance for middle-class "necessities" is just a cop out. If we were to follow the strict logic of his position, we could have no other moral projects, and no other life. All other goods—social, emotional, intellectual—must be placed aside.

What could possibly motivate anyone to live the moral life Singer proposes? In truth, we must have many different moral projects, each requiring different levels of obligation. The arid abstraction of utilitarianism, as shown in *Hard Times*, does not leave enough room to develop the close personal attachments and fellow-feeling that serve as the well-spring of moral sentiment in the first place. Nor can its "empirical" measure of human happiness account for the fact that there is more than suffering even in the lives of those who suffer most.

Moral complacency is the most likely response to extreme demands like Singer's. Happily, Singer cannot live his life according to his philosophy anymore than Gradgrind could. In the *New Yorker* profile, it is revealed that Singer's mother is afflicted with Alzheimer's disease. In blunt terms, she is no longer a "person" according to Singer's criteria. Nevertheless, Singer pays for her care even though the money could at least theoretically be put to better use in famine and poverty relief. Asked how he could justify his decision, Singer answered, "Perhaps it is more difficult than I thought before, because it is different when it's your mother."

Yes, it is. And that is not an excuse for self-indulgence at the expense of the poor, but the beginning of wisdom about how a narrow moral premise and a cramped idea of human agency can have lethal consequences.

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Throughout 1999, Commonweal *has been celebrating its 75th anniversary. Here from the August 5, 1925 issue is an excerpt from "Summing Up at Dayton," the conclusion of a series of reports on the Scopes trial, written by* Commonweal*'s editor Michael Williams.*

There remains still another question, which not only was not summed up at Dayton, but also could not be summed up by any judge, or any counsel, any more than it could be settled by the verdict of any jury. This is the issue which John Henry Newman had in mind, when, in his *Apologia*, he summed up the events and conclusions of his own religious struggle—the issue that comes when each man must face the ultimate realities of self and God.

Despite the crudities...of the late Mr. Bryan and the fundamentalists, they have shouted, raucously it may be, yet in a way that compels attention, a question which each and every soul must face, as Newman faced it—even if not to the same answering act of faith.

That question is--"What think you of God?"

A score of collateral questions surround or trail after the central one. Is man a mere accident in an accidental universe? Is he a mere chemical cell in a vast agglomeration of chemical cells? Is he an atom of force whirling amid an endless interweaving of blind, undirected forces? Has he no future even save nothingness and oblivion? Has he no real will, no true individuality, no true responsibility, no eternal future? Or is he the child of a Father whose life is love and who sent Christ to tell man so, and to prove it?

Each soul must answer these questions, or ignore them. Upon the way in which the question is answered by individuals depends not merely the fate of this nation, but the fate of the world.

MICHAEL WILLIAMS

ETHICS WATCH

DANIEL CALLAHAN

AGAINST IDEOLOGY

Solving health-care problems

For the past two years I have been directing an international research project at the Hastings Center on "Medicine and the Market." My aim has been to see how, in different cultural and political settings, the relatively recent turn to market ideas and tactics has affected health-care systems. Do market strategies help to control costs? What do they do to equity of access to health care? What is the impact on the doctor-patient relationship and on physician integrity? I could go on at inordinate length about what I have found so far—in general, market strategies don't necessarily control costs well, equity is almost never helped, and the evidence is mixed about the effect on the doctor-patient relationship—but I want instead to talk about the ethical problem of trying to carry out a study of this kind.

Good ethical analysis, I believe, requires three skills and one key virtue. One of the skills is an understanding and wise deployment of ethical arguments and traditions, religious and philosophical. Another is a lively awareness of the social and cultural setting of moral problems and dilemmas. Still another is self-understanding, by which I mean an ability to see and to assess one's emotional responses to problems and to spot one's biases and predilections. The key virtue is that of honesty: a willingness to take on the hard problems fairly and squarely and to be always self-critical. Ideology also plays a crucial part in the way people respond to many moral problems; that is, the way they see the world and position issues over against their own social and political agendas. Hence, the skills and virtues I mentioned may first of all have to be deployed to deal with those ideologies.

For a large number of people, "the market" has a quasi-religious status. It is not just a way of managing financial relationships but the key to a free and decent society. Government is the enemy, stifling commerce, promoting the dead hand of bureaucracy, and interfering with personal liberty. A strong market is the antidote. For another group, also large, the market is a symbol of uncontrolled self-interest and injustice and in practice a recipe for a cruel social order. A participatory democratic order, a strong role for government in promoting

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the common well-being of society, and a vigorous concern for the poor and dispossessed are social necessities. The commodification of life, which the market advances, is the greatest enemy.

The trouble with these competing ideologies is that they have different human goods as their focus, different notions of social evil, and a different attitude toward the available evidence about their value. Market proponents tend to dismiss the accusation that it promotes a dog-eat-dog society; they argue for the necessity of a strong moral order to undergird the market—and it was Adam Smith who first said that. Yes, market values can be a corrosive acid for moral values, but not necessarily. Strong religious values offer an important line of defense against market corruption. Market opponents do not take the rise and fall of communism as the ultimate story about the place of government and planned economies. Communism was terrible, but it was an aberration, nothing more than a recipe for a police state dressed up in the rhetoric of equality. The welfare states of Western Europe offer better, more democratic models.

So the arguments go, back and forth. An ideologue may be defined as someone who believes that the issues have once and for all been settled, that there is nothing good to be said for the other side. That is precisely what makes a project on medicine and the market difficult to manage. First of all, it is true, as market zealots argue, that the market in its purest form has never been tried; there are no governments that have abandoned all health programs, turning them over to the private sector. Governments have, so to speak, infected all markets by their regulatory interference, not giving them a decent chance to show what they can do. It is also true, as strong-government proponents often contend, that market practices and attitudes can subvert good government. For-profit HMOs, for instance, are likely to provide poorer care for the elderly under Medicare than nonprofit organizations.

There is a conventional answer to all this coming from health-care economists. It is that no country could or should have a purely market approach to the care of sick people. Not everyone will be able to pay for health care and every government will be forced to do something about that. The real question is not market vs. government, but getting the right balance, allowing play to the market but maintaining a good government safety net for those unable to pay for health care.

Well, it is always hard to argue against "balanced" approaches to anything, and I will not do so here. I have no doubt that that particular strategy will carry the day in most countries, though of course with different balances in different places. What I think important is to treat the problem as, essentially, a matter of practical judgment, trying as much as possible to put aside the kind of faith and singlemindedness that nourishes ideologies and ideologues. Almost every country in the world is now having a problem paying for health care. Experiments and reforms abound. That is a good thing. No one can really say at this point how best to run and fund health-care systems in the long run. The Right has turned the market into a holy grail, good for whatever ails us, from prisons to health-care systems. That's silly, and dangerous. The Left hasn't sufficiently noticed that welfare-oriented governments have not yet found a way to run universal health-care systems that effectively cope with aging societies, constant and expensive technological innovation, and rising public demand. Most look to the market, at least a little bit, for some help.

The main moral I draw is this: Be slow to make large and sweeping moral judgments about medicine and the market. Instead, watch the experiments carefully; be simultaneously hopeful, encouraging, and skeptical about reform schemes; take your time. I don't believe they will work, but then nothing else is working very well either. So, as Chairman Mao once said, "Let a thousand flowers bloom"—but it could have been Adam Smith. □

75 COMMONWEAL

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E.J. DIONNE, Jr.

CAMPAIGN SPENDING

Business cries uncle

No one is more fiercely consistent in opposing reform of our broken campaign money system than Senator Mitch McConnell, a Kentucky Republican (and chair of the national Republican committee that raises funds for senatorial candidates). So when the senator attacked a group of business leaders who say the money chase verges on what one of them calls "a shakedown," it was not his intention to give the reform movement a boost.

That's what he's done with his assault on the Committee for Economic Development (CED). The venerable business organization's sin was issuing a report endorsing campaign-finance reform. Its argument, not heard widely enough, is that many business leaders are as tired of being pressured to cough up political money as politicians are at having to raise it.

"In many, many cases it's a shakedown, and they have no choice but to give," Edward Kangus, chairman of Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu, said of his fellow executives in an interview. "It's presented to them as, 'This is what you have to do,' with whatever veiled message that sends. Especially if they're a regulated industry, they have no choice but to play the game." Kangus, who co-chairs the committee on campaign finance reform at CED, also worries about business complicity with a bad system. "Our customers believe that we are co-conspirators in this system and that we are as corrupt as the politicians who are pushing this on us. And that's not good for business."

Charles Kolb, president of the CED and a Republican who served in the Bush administration, summarized his group's thoroughly free-market view this way: "Our business trustees would rather compete in the marketplace than in the political arena."

In its report, the Washington-based CED endorses banning the flow of unregulated "soft money" to campaigns, an issue that will sharply divide Congress in the coming weeks. This group's most innovative suggestion is to use public money to provide a two-for-one match of all small contributions—those of $200 or less.

That means, if you gave $200, the fund would kick in $400 more. But the two-for-one match only covers the first $200 contributed. That would mean that a $1,000 contributor would get the same $400 match as the $200 giver. Matching only small contributions, the report says, would provide candidates "with a strong financial incentive to seek out small contributions from a large number of donors."

Ah, but isn't this "taxpayer financing" of politics? Refreshingly, the CED doesn't flinch. "We make no apology for proposing direct public financing of this program," its report declares. "The improvement of our campaign finance system is a public benefit, and it should therefore be publicly funded. It is an investment in the people's business."

"One thing I cannot abide, is a mockery of our laws."

The CED also proposes lifting the current $1,000 ceiling on individual contributions to $3,000. By itself, this change would only increase money's influence on politics. But as a new way of winning votes for a broad package of serious reforms, it might be a useful concession to politicians tired of wasting time raising money in $1,000 chunks.

Faced with opponents hard to stereotype as wide-eyed radicals, McConnell tried to do so anyway. In a letter to business executives associated with the group, he charged the CED with an "all-out campaign to eviscerate private-sector participation in politics." My, my. He said CED supported a "radical campaign finance agenda" and "antibusiness speech controls." Ominously, he suggested to his correspondents that "public withdrawal from this organization would be a reasonable response." Since his letter was first made public by the *New York Times*, McConnell has stayed on the attack. His office released an op-ed piece he's circulating to Kentucky newspapers charging the CED with "unethical conduct."

The CED, for its part, has noted the irony that McConnell's publicly expressed solicitude for First Amendment rights did not stop him from seeking "to stifle" theirs. "This letter has kind of exposed the way the system works in a fashion that I don't think is terribly flattering," Kolb says, referring to McConnell's efforts to push businesses to sever ties with the CED. "The subtext is very clear: Keep playing with those guys, and I won't play with you."

The message of this episode is simple: Many business people believe the system holds them for political ransom. It distorts the market by producing rules and tax laws that favor one competitor over another not on the basis of market prowess, but as a product of who contributes to whom and who works the system best. The committed capitalists at the CED understand that. And now, thanks to Senator McConnell, they'll be heard. □

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John Horgan

NOTHING IS SACRED

Blasphemy in Ireland

The Irish Supreme Court, in a recent judgment, struck a major blow in defense of freedom of speech and—paradoxically—raised questions about whether, in this most religious of countries, anyone can ever be successfully indicted for blasphemy.

The framers of the Irish constitution, which came into force in 1937, would have been appalled by the question. They did not even need pressure from clerics of all denominations to draft article 40, which laid down that "the publication or utterance of blasphemous matter is an offense which shall be punishable in accordance with law." Even this did not go far enough for one conservative bishop, the redoubtable Dr. Cornelius Lucey of Cork, who argued in the pages of the *Irish Ecclesiastical Record* that "antireligious" sentiment should be similarly punished. He did not get his way, but the constitution, as finally enacted, did not give rise to any problems on this score. After all, everyone knew what blasphemy was. Or did they?

The difficulty is that, because everyone was so sure about the meaning of blasphemy, the Irish Parliament never passed a law defining it. This has belatedly become important in view of the provision in the constitution which says that blasphemy is a crime, but makes it clear that blasphemers shall be punished "in accordance with law." But what do you do if there is no law?

The Supreme Court case in which these issues were raised is the first occasion on which a blasphemy prosecution had been heard in an Irish court since 1855. On that occasion, however, the Anglican church was the established Church of Ireland and enjoyed the full protection of the law. The prosecution was brought for a case of Bible burning. But there is now no established church, and the "special position" formerly accorded to the Catholic church in the 1937 Constitution was removed by the people almost thirty years ago in a 1972 referendum, partly as a gesture to the Protestants of Northern Ireland.

"So you think I'm too pedantic, eh?—And just exactly what is your definition of 'pedantic'?"

The complainant in the current case, a Dublin carpenter named John Corway, had originally sought leave of a lower court to bring blasphemy prosecutions against a daily newspaper, a weekly newspaper, and a music magazine for cartoons and an article—published in association with a 1996 referendum that introduced divorce into Ireland for the first time—which, in his view, were blasphemous. When the court refused him leave to proceed, he appealed to the Supreme Court, which has now thrown out the case. He is also liable for all the lawyers' costs in the case, which will run to tens of thousands of pounds.

In its judgment, the Court noted that the Constitution, in spite of the fact that it agrees that "the homage of public worship is due to Almighty God," also guarantees freedom of conscience and of expression to those of all religions and of none. "The state," it commented, "is not placed in the position of an arbiter of religious truth." In the absence of any law giving practical expression to the constitutional prohibition on blasphemy, the Court ruled, "it is impossible to say of what the offense of blasphemy consists."

This situation is in marked contrast to the law in the neighboring island where, in 1979, the well-known campaigner for traditional values in media, Mary Whitehouse, won a blasphemy case in the House of Lords. In that case, the Law Lords—British equivalent of the Irish Supreme Court—held that Whitehouse did not need to prove any specific intention to blaspheme—merely an intention to publish what was held to be blasphemous matter.

More recently, case law in Britain was carried even further when British Muslims were told that they could not bring a prosecution for blasphemy against Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* because in Britain, where the Anglican church is still the established church, blasphemy applied to Christianity alone.

The Irish judges, in a sideways swipe at their British counterparts, made a deliberate point about the differences between Irish and British law. Noting that both the Christian and Jewish religions were mentioned in the 1937 Irish Constitution, they asked: "What then is the position of the Muslim religion, or of polytheistic religions such as Hinduism? Would the constitutional guarantees of equality before the law and of the free profession of religion be respected, if one citizen's religion enjoyed constitutional protection from insult but another's did not?"

As far as the Irish Supreme Court judges are concerned, this is plainly a rhetorical question. No Irish government would now contemplate drafting a law defining blasphemy. And speech—evidently to the discomfiture of some—is just a little bit freer than it used to be. □

John Horgan *teaches journalism at City University in Dublin.*

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Isabel Kaldenbach

FACE VALUE

Why we still need affirmative action

There is a widespread view that affirmative-action programs—if they exist—should be based on economic status rather than physiology. It is a compelling argument that goes something like this: A poor Caucasian boy from a rural backwater has faced just as little opportunity as an African-American boy from an urban ghetto. Richard Rodriguez of the Pacific News Service summed up the argument last year: "The language of affirmative action is...that poor white males...are somehow represented in the public society. Like hell they are. Where are the Appalachian whites represented?" In other words, poor whites are just as lacking in opportunity and representation as minorities. A persuasive point—but wrong.

Granted that in terms of access to education, career options, mentors, and the ability to "network"—a critical key to job success—the Appalachian boy is severely hampered. But he has a tremendous advantage over the African-American boy. In interviews, conversations, face-to-face encounters, the Appalachian boy will always be white. Whether you call it racism, whether you call it discomfort, whether you call it "fitting in," the stereotyping of physical attributes is alive and well in America. Ask any darker-skinned American, any woman, or any person with a visible disability.

I am one of those Latinas who defy immediate definition. I'm a brunette with Caucasian features, European last name, and no discernible accent, so that most people have no idea I am Hispanic. When I shop in my local Latino grocery the workers take pains to address me in English, under the mistaken impression that I don't speak Spanish. When I was employed by a migrant-worker program, colleagues in sister organizations assumed I was a *gringa* helping "others." Colleagues are surprised, and once one of my bosses did a double take when canvassing for annual Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) reports.

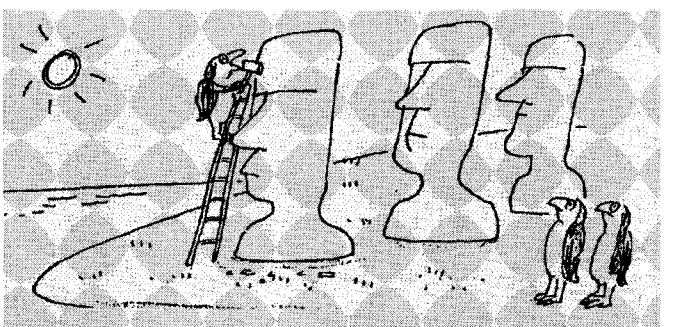
My Mexican mother, whose face, accent, and name broadcast her ethnicity, has endured horrible and painful discrimination. In contrast, I can say that I have never noticed any different treatment based on ethnicity. However, I *do* look and sound like a woman, and that *has* hampered me economically. Male counterparts have consistently earned more than I have, no matter the job, no matter the seniority, even when we occupied the same job grade, and sometimes even when I outranked and supervised them—my pay having been set upstairs by my own boss. In more than one professional job, I have been singled out from my male counterparts who occupied the same exact job and been asked to type documents, run errands, and do other administrative tasks. I have endured offhand evaluation of job performance based on "that time of the month."

You can't attribute this difference in pay or treatment to an inability to negotiate good deals or to "stand up for myself." Every one of my female friends has a similar list of anecdotes, regardless of background, personality, race, or ethnicity. The fact that women earn on average 74 percent of what male counterparts are paid, and the myriad of other statistics showing disparity in hiring, promotion, and compensation of women indicate that my individual experiences reflect the situation at large in America.

Nor can this be blamed on "mommy tracking"—choosing jobs that pay less but permit more flexibility or shorter hours in the workplace. Recently, a great deal of attention has been focused on the gender gap: Is there or isn't there one? Or more precisely: Yes, we all agree there is one, but is this gap due to self-selected "mommy tracking"? Diana Furchgott-Roth and Christine Stolba have published a study that purports to show that "mommy tracking" and personal choice are the reason for lower compensation among older women, but that the younger generation of professional women (twenty-seven to thirty-three years old) is facing a pay gap of only two cents. I hope they are right about the younger crowd. However, as one of the upper-thirty-year-olds dismissed in the study to "mommy tracking," I am perplexed. My female colleagues and I are paid less and are treated differently from our male counterparts, yet very few of us are mommies, and fewer still have chosen mommy-tracked flexible jobs. I am single, have no children, and have never shrunk from twelve-hour days or heavy travel. The same goes for the majority of my friends. I am at least as educated as every man who has ever outearned me at comparable or subordinate jobs: I have a Georgetown J.D., a Harvard M.A., and an undergraduate degree from Princeton.

I do not mean to deny that my friends and I have probably received some economic benefit because of gender. I expect that the ability to provide the chance to check the right box on the EEOC form has on occasion worked in my favor and helped me get a job.

But whatever benefits have come my way are still outweighed by the prevailing economic penalties. Being a visible woman and an invisible Hispanic has enlightened me



"Of course it doesn't look anything like us. Do you think anyone would believe a penguin could create a statue like this?"

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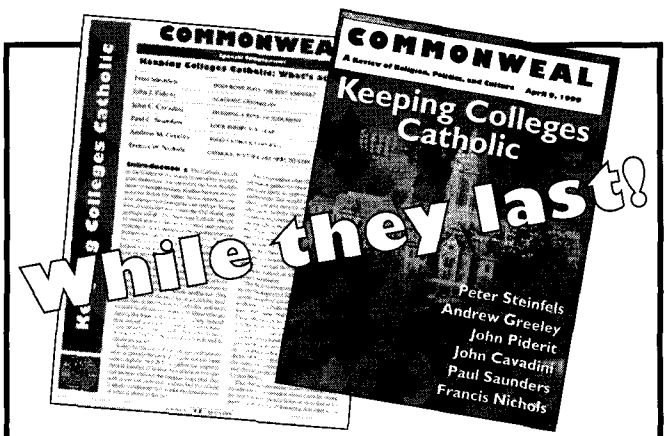
to some basic facts: First, people do judge you on what they can see; and second, many folks still harbor strong reactions based on traditional stereotypes. People who are *visibly different*—because of race, ethnicity, gender, disability, or whatever physical feature—are still pigeonholed and penalized.

Until economic disparity based on physical traits is eliminated, affirmative-action programs and preferences based on those traits are needed. I wish this weren't so. Efforts to level the economic playing field should be based on economic factors. Moreover, racial and ethnic definitions are woefully arbitrary. My Mexican grandmother looked Native American, her Mexican husband was blond and blue-eyed, there are African-American Hispanics, and my mother has been mistaken for Asian more than once.

Given the reality of economic poverty and the illusory definitions of race and ethnicity, it does make sense to tailor affirmative action to economic need. Some day maybe we will get there, but not yet. We can't yet look to people's wallets because, right now, we still can't get past their faces. □

Isabel Kaldenbach *is CEO of Buckley & Kaldenbach, a public relations and communications firm based in Arlington, Virginia.*



Keeping Catholic Colleges Catholic

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John A. Coleman

TOGETHERNESS IS ALL

In the search for justice

The spectacle of three thousand American Catholics spending four days reflecting on justice and Catholic social teaching was, declared Monsignor George Higgins, "a miracle." Higgins, the legendary labor priest, could not recall, in his long career as an ecclesial social animator, a previous event remotely like this one. The Jubilee Justice Congress, held on the campus of the University of California, Los Angeles (July 15–18) was, he concluded, well planned, well executed, and focused entirely on justice issues. It also brought together a remarkably diverse group of people from social activists to ordinary parishioners.

Catholic institutional networks were well represented. There were, for example, directors and staff from Catholic Charities USA, Catholic Relief Services, and the Campaign for Human Development. Other groups included the Catholic AIDS Network, the Catholic Daughters of America, the Catholic Health Association, the Association of Diocesan Social Action Directors, the Black Catholic Congress, the Catholic Rural Life Conference, the Catholic Legal Immigration Network, the Saint Vincent de Paul Society, and Pax Christi USA. All told, more than forty national Catholic organizations provided the initial lists for generating attendance. Add to these a sampling of diocesan and parish social-justice commissions and a small number of community organizers.

The institutional association of so many participants mirrored the observation of J. Bryan Hehir that the Catholic church is, quintessentially, *the institutional church*. It generates institutions because it recognizes that they anchor a vision and activate the community. The impressive array of American Catholic institutions (schools, parishes, dioceses, hospitals, Catholic Charities agencies, statewide Catholic conferences) has learned to connect hands-on services with issues of public policy on a day-to-day basis. It is those institutions, rather than think tanks or ad hoc movements, that test public policies against the church's justice agenda, and it is they that provided the majority of speakers at the Los Angeles gathering.

Five plenary sessions rooted the congress's social-justice concerns in prayer, spirituality, liturgy, and the Eucharist. Martina O'Sullivan, director of Catholic Charities of Monterey, California, admitted that she had not anticipated being so spiritually moved and nurtured. Key concepts or policy proposals were enriched with poetry, art, and song. Perhaps the most moving plenary session occurred on Saturday when seven participants marched in procession holding aloft colorful banners enumerating seven principles of Catholic social teaching:

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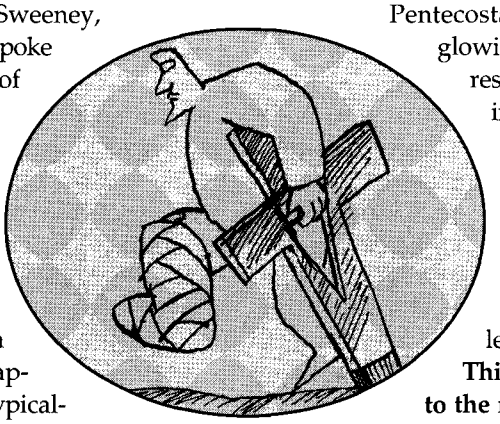
- the life and dignity of the human person;
- the call to family, community, and participation;
- rights and responsibilities;
- the option for the poor and vulnerable;
- the dignity of work and the rights of workers;
- solidarity;
- care for God's creation.

Then, lectors proclaimed brief scriptural passages illustrating each of the themes. Music, song, and dance added to their symbolic richness. Finally, seven conference participants gave brief personal testimonies. John Sweeney, president of the AFL-CIO, for example, spoke of his work for the dignity and rights of workers. The Nobel peace laureate, Bishop Carlos Belo, linked the theme of rights and responsibilities to his struggle for a just society in East Timor. Each of the plenary sessions was embedded in such a carefully constructed liturgical setting. Thus, during a celebration of reconciliation, Sister Helen Prejean spoke about her work to end capital punishment. The gathering was, atypically for Catholics, designed to be family-friendly and family-inclusive. Throughout the four days parallel sessions were organized for children and for high school students. These young people joined their elders for all the large liturgical events and plenary sessions.



Four lessons can be drawn from the congress:

First, Catholic social teaching can serve as a common ground among ideologically divided Catholics. The Jubilee gathering was not simply the Democratic party at prayer. A range of participants came from groups closely connected to prolife and anti-euthanasia concerns. Many of the "ordinary" parishioners were decidedly middle and upper-middle class. Jesuit peace activist John Dear, of the Fellowship of Reconciliation, grumbled to me before the congress convened that its organizers had "sanitized" and "controlled" the range of presenters. In retrospect, I do not share his apprehensions. If we are to construe Catholic identity partially around the centrality of Catholic social teaching, it will have to be presented in ways that will allow it to serve as a "common ground" for Catholics of varying social classes, ethnic groups, and ideological tendencies. The almost universal enthusiasm of these diverse participants demonstrated that, when properly presented, Catholic social teaching can still function as a common ground for Catholics engaged in the world.

Second, Catholic social teaching has intellectual content, a historical background, a trajectory into the future. From the vantage point of religious education, the genius of the Los Angeles gathering was its pedagogical linking of Catholic social teaching to a simplified (but not simplistic) list of seven capsule slogans. But a *caveat* is needed. Some of the participants reported that while they were deeply nurtured by the gathering, they came away without much of a clue as to what grounded the proposed social-justice principles. They gained little sense of the history that gave rise to the seven principles or a deeper intellectual grasp of how these cohered or were rooted in the Catholic tradition. To be sure, this was not a meeting of intellectuals. But even ordinary parishioners need and want to know not only what the capstone ideas are, but also how they are grounded in our tradition.

There is a major paradox here. In one of the plenary sessions, the Reverend Eugene Rivers, an African-American Pentecostal minister working in Boston, paid a glowing tribute to the specifically intellectual resources inherent in Catholic social teaching that allow a graceful mediation from a biblical vision to policy and action. He said he used it as a supplement to the personal narrative testimonials and spirituality so prevalent in his Pentecostal church. Yet, in very few of the congress sessions did that larger, intellectually grounded vision find a voice.

Third, Catholic social teaching must speak to the mind as well as the heart. Clearly, the imaginative way the Jubilee gathering tried to link concepts to song, music, Scripture, worship, iconic banners, and living human testimonials remains an essential component for promoting Catholic social teaching. A problem occurs when the principles, iconically and emotionally well-illustrated, remain unrooted in a richer historical and intellectual analysis.

Four, the seriousness of commitment to Catholic social teaching is linked to institutional imagination and implementation. A final paradoxical lesson from the Jubilee gathering is that, although the institutional strength of the Catholic church is vigorous, very few of the plenary sessions explicitly pointed out this linkage or hinted that visions that are not institutionalized die on the vine. There was too little talk about how to move from new visions to incipient forms of strategic institutionalization.

Institutional imagination goes strongly against the American grain with its exaggerated individualism. Many Catholics, too, reject a model of the church that emphasizes its institutional character, out of fear of a static and overly exclusive emphasis on hierarchy. But a learning experience from the Jubilee gathering might take a leaf from Hehir: The church is *the institutional church* because it keeps generating institutions to embody and carry on its values. This rich and more dynamic sense of a church directed at moving toward institutionalization need not carry connotations of a *status quo* hierarchalism. Some such institutional imagination and emphasis seem essential in order to pass on the central Catholic notions of the common good and justice as we work toward a well-structured, participatory society. □

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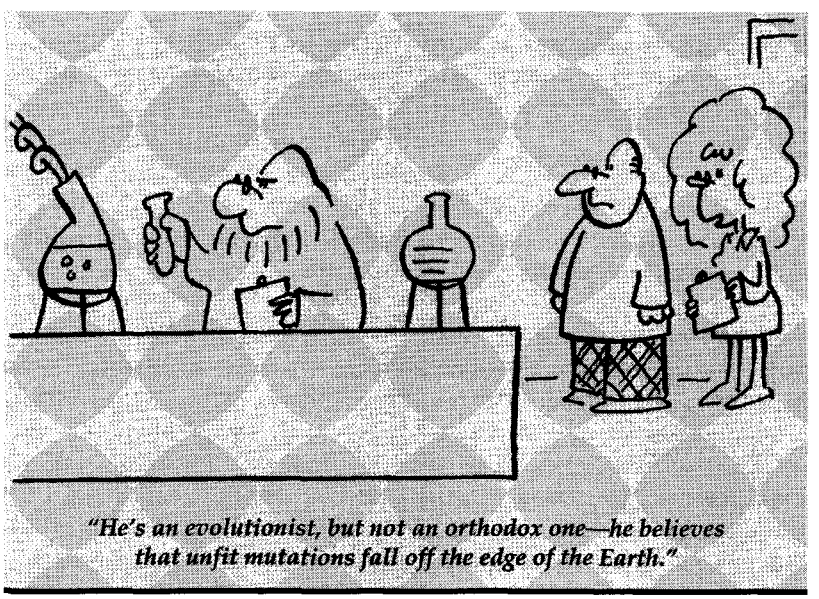
THE DARWINIAN STRUGGLE

Catholics, pay attention

John F. Haught

"Charles Darwin has never been more popular than today," writes John Durant in the July 11 *New York Times Book Review*. "His theory of natural selection is all but universally accepted as the correct explanation for the diversity of life on earth." Much of the religious world, however, still struggles with Darwin. On August 11, for example, the Kansas Board of Education, bowing to pressure from Christian "creationists," decided that the topic of evolution (as well as reference to Big Bang cosmology) will no longer be included in statewide tests for evaluating students' knowledge of science. Appropriately lamenting the decision, Harvard paleontologist Stephen Jay Gould commented in *Time* magazine (August 23) that the deletion of evolution from the required biology curriculum is comparable to teaching chemistry without the periodic table, or American history without mentioning Lincoln. Both the Kansas decision and Gould's essay provide the occasion for a few remarks on the question of evolution and theology.



"He's an evolutionist, but not an orthodox one—he believes that unfit mutations fall off the edge of the Earth."

To a large number of American Christians (over 40 percent), Darwin's vision of nature still seems irreconcilable with their most cherished beliefs. Even apart from the obvious challenge by evolutionary science to biblical literalism, it is not terribly difficult to understand why. For one thing, the variations that compose the raw material for evolution are said to be completely accidental, undirected by any divine intelligence. Next, the competitive "struggle" in which weaker organisms (the reproductively unfit) are ruthlessly eliminated exposes a universe apparently untended by divine compassion. And the disinterested manner of natural selection strongly suggests that we live in a remorselessly uncaring universe, one hardly residing in the bosom of a providing deity. Add to this the idea that life and mind arose with no sharp breaks from mindless matter over a period of billions of years, and you have the picture of a universe quite unlike any conceived of by our traditional religions.

As the result of long brooding over his own discoveries, Darwin himself had confessed that disbelief gradually "crept over" him. And to many contemporary neo-Darwinians such "disbelief" seems to be a most logical implication of their science. The evolutionary process is, in the words of David Hull, "rife with happenstance, contingency, incredible waste, death, pain, and horror." Any God who would devise or watch over a Darwinian world must be "careless, indifferent, almost diabolical." This is not, says Hull, "the sort of God to whom anyone would be inclined to pray."

Lacking a convincing theology of evolution, not only biblicist Kansans but also the world of religious thought in general has had difficulty coming to grips with Darwin. Even though most noncreationist theologians have given notional assent to evolution, and the pope himself has conceded its general probability, those who have actually appropriated Darwin's science in depth are, I believe, comparatively few. Even outside of Protestant fundamentalist circles antipathy to Darwin seems to be gathering strength in some religious circles. The journal *First Things* habitually offers safe harbor to anti-Darwinians such as Phillip Johnson (who has also written for *Commonweal*) and Nancy Pearsey. A re-

John F. Haught *is professor of theology at Georgetown. His latest book,* God after Darwin: A Theology of Evolution, *will be published in October by Westview Press. In a subsequent article, Professor Haught will elaborate on his ideas about the nature of a post-Darwinian theology.*

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cent editorial in the *Homiletic and Pastoral Review* called Darwin's science "a fairy tale for adults." And the Catholic biochemist Michael Behe (*Darwin's Black Box*, Touchstone), proposing "intelligent design" as a scientific refutation of Darwin, has achieved considerable popularity among religious conservatives.

Meanwhile, even moderate and liberal Christian theologians generally avoid sustained discussion of Darwinian evolution. Many will allow that "evolution is God's way of creating," but in order to espouse even this much they often seem to edit out the most repellent features of Darwin's own troubling picture of life. Most contemporary theology still fails to reflect the obvious: Darwin has changed forever how we can reasonably think about God—that is, if we think about God at all.

However, if theology has fallen short of Darwin, so has the intellectual world at large. As the late Jewish philosopher Hans Jonas reminded us in one of his last essays, philosophy remains stuck in a materialism completely inadequate to the opulence of evolution. Moreover, it is worth noting that "enlightened" evolutionary materialists are typically no less biblically literalist than the majority members of the Kansas Board of Education. For example, Tufts philosopher Daniel Dennett (*Consciousness Explained*, Little, Brown & Co.), whom Marvin Minsky calls "our best current philosopher," brazenly declares his agreement with the creationists, claiming with them that Darwin's great idea is indeed incompatible with the Bible. "Science has won and religion has lost," he proudly announces. "Darwin's idea has banished the Book of Genesis to the limbo of quaint mythology."

Similarly, Harvard biologist E.O. Wilson expresses wonderment that anyone would try to reconcile the Bible with biology. Together with the Kansas creationists he puts Darwin's science into sharp competition with Genesis, a work that disappoints him by failing to provide a quality grade of information about the natural world. Surely, he complains in his celebrated recent book *Consilience* (Alfred A. Knopf), if the Scriptures were inerrant they would not have given us so faulty a picture of nature. By overlooking evolution "the biblical authors had missed the most important revelation of all!" Although Dennett and Wilson may differ from creationists in declaring Darwin right and the Bible wrong, they are just as anachronistic in expecting the ancient texts to yield reliable science.

Recently, however, America's most prolific evolutionist, Stephen Jay Gould, has been striving mightily to put a distance between himself and the publicly anti-theistic neo-Darwinians. While candidly professing his own agnosticism, apparently Gould has awakened to the fact that in a theistic culture the cause of science education is hardly served by tying Darwin's ideas as tightly to the death of God as do his rivals, especially Dennett and the Oxford zoologist Richard Dawkins (*The Blind Watchmaker* [Norton] and *The Selfish Gene* [Oxford University Press]). Dennett and Dawkins

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Bee in Amber

A single syllable
held unsung
for centuries

in such bliss
as this bitter honey
might still level

a holy city
or bring a pilgrim,
as he tries

to sing it, swiftly
to his knees.

R.T. Smith

clearly enjoy brandishing the atheism they claim to be the underside of Darwin's revolution, while Gould considers such antics to be pointless.

In his *Time* commentary, Gould once again makes his constant insistence that there can really be no conflict between evolution and faith. Science and religion, he says, are talking about two entirely disparate sets of topics. They should be "equal, mutually respecting partners, each the master of its own domain, and with each domain vital to human life in a different way." As he has elsewhere recently begun to put it, science and religion are "nonoverlapping magisteria" (NOMA).

One must credit Gould for trying so hard to bridge the deep cultural divide between the religious world and evolutionary science. It is hard to doubt his sincerity. Still, a closer look at his own rather cropped and condescending interpretation of religion raises serious questions about whether he really provides much help.

The problem is that Gould never concedes the slightest cognitive status to religion or theology. Science, he writes in *Time*, is "an inquiry about the factual state of the natural world." Religion, on the other hand, is a "search for spiritual meaning and ethical values." He never allows that religion can put us in touch with transcendent reality or, for that matter, give us anything resembling truth. Rather, no less than Dawkins, Dennett, and Wilson, he holds that only science can be trusted to put us in touch with *what is*. At best, religion paints a coat of "value" over the otherwise valueless "facts" disclosed by science. Religion can enshroud reality with "meaning," but, for Gould, this meaning is purely of our own making.

Perhaps a generous reading will allow that this is at least some progress. I personally doubt it, though, since the real issue in Kansas and elsewhere is whether, in the wake of Darwin's ideas about nature, we can coherently claim—independently of our own valuations—that the universe is in fact purposeful. That Gould himself rejects such a possibility for Darwinian reasons is clear from his own writings. Throughout his career he has maintained that what makes Darwin so difficult for people to swallow is not the science of evolution as such, but the "philosophical message" that comes along with it. And just what is this message? As Gould expresses it in such books as *Ever Since Darwin* and *Wonderful Life* (both Norton), Darwin's message is that life has no direction, that there is no purpose to the universe, and that matter is "all there is." And, as far as Gould is concerned, this "philosophical message" cannot appropriately be disengaged from Darwin's science.

Thus, in the end, beneath his well-intended overtures to religion, Gould, in company with Dawkins and Dennett, allows that only a materialist and absurdist philosophy can appropriately contextualize evolutionary science. We should note that Gould himself is not at all frustrated by this state of affairs. An inherently meaningless world, he submits, allows us humans to give our own meanings to it, and in this way realize our special creative potential.

Needless to say, not only creationists, but all religious believers—not to mention ecological ethicists—can only shiver at Gould's repeated contention that we alone are the authors of nature's value and meaning. If he is correct in tying Darwin's theory inalienably to the idea of a cosmos intrinsically devoid of overall significance, then no conceivable theology, by anyone's definition, could ever live comfortably with evolution. Gould is certainly correct to observe that "no scientific theory, including evolution, can pose any threat to religion." But his persistent approval of the materialist ideology in which allegedly "scientific" presentations of Darwin's great idea often come packaged does not help his case.

Where, then, does this leave us? The Kansas decision, the general reluctance of religious thought to engage Darwin head-on, and the academically sponsored persistence of materialist evolutionism all show, once again, that convincing noncreationist theological interpretations of Darwinian evolution are virtually unknown to both the scientific community and vast numbers of religious people. Theology simply needs to pay more attention to evolution. Although biblical literalism will always be an obstacle, our religious thought and education could at least begin to show more clearly than before how the Darwinian picture of life is more or less what we should expect if the world's creator is a God of infinite love. While Teilhard de Chardin and Alfred North Whitehead may have helped us begin this work, the science of evolution has continued to evolve, and it is now time for a more rigorous and publicly accessible renewal of post-Darwinian theology. □

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RELIGION AFTER COMMUNISM

Churches stumble in Eastern Europe

Adam Szostkiewicz

Editors' Note: A decade has passed since the fall of communism in Eastern and Central Europe. The political and economic transformations taking place in these now independent nations are widely reported and closely followed. Less is heard of their religious evolution and the role that churches and other religious institutions are playing in this process. Below, the Polish journalist Adam Szostkiewicz offers his assessment of these matters. His remarks were given at a conference, "Destruction and Renewal: The Role of Religion in Changing Society," convened by the International Council of Christians and Jews in Kiev, July 11–15, 1999. This excerpt is printed with the permission of the author and the ICCJ. The editors are grateful to Judith Banki of the Tanenbaum Center in New York for calling it to our attention.

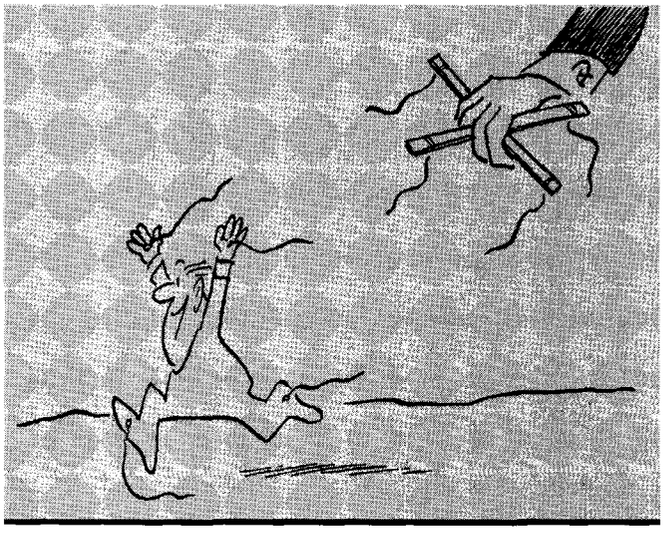
After World War II, the official policy of the Communist parties taking power in Eastern and Central Europe was to suppress any religious presence by imposing severe restrictions on churches and other religious institutions. The authorities worked to ensure that organized religion would lose its social, political, and moral influence and eventually its grip on the hearts, minds, and imaginations of the people. When religion went, there would be no barriers to building the New Man and the New Society.

In every country, the police and secret service used a mixture of coercion, blackmail, reprisals, and brainwashing. They were helped by the propaganda of the state-run mass education system and the media. For the educated classes and intellectuals, a more refined system of historical and philosophical discussion was employed. Examples from social and political history were used to undermine the credibility and the prestige of the churches. So too with the clergy who were defined as a distinct social group with a well-defined agenda of their own interests, which they protected to the detriment of the poor and ill-educated.

How successful were the Communists? Religion was almost totally eliminated in Soviet Russia and Albania, or should I say, "deactivated." In Czechoslovakia and Hungary, this antireligious, antichurch policy was helped along by the processes of secularization that had begun well before the coming of the Communist system. With the exception of my own country, Poland, churches and religious organizations in Eastern and Central Europe were unable to maintain the positions and the credibility they held before the age of communism.

For particular historical reasons, Catholicism in Poland proved to be an effective bulwark against the New Society project. The Catholic church under Cardinal Stefan Wyszynski, the primate of Poland, not only maintained a remarkable degree of independence from the Communist state, but was also able to serve as a substitute for the independent institutions of a free society. The sheer strength of the Catholic religion within the population was key, but mistakes by the government increased the church's moral authority. A spectacular example was the "arrest" of a copy of the much-revered icon of the Black Madonna from the shrine at Czestochowa. In 1966, the icon was being paraded throughout the country to celebrate Poland's first millennium of Christianity. The celebrations drew huge crowds of believers, dramatically demonstrating the undiminished attraction of religion. When the police took the icon away, Cardinal Wyszynski told the celebrants to continue the parade with an empty frame, which became the symbol of the regime's ruthless violation of basic civil rights. Twenty-three years later the regime was gone, religion was still in place.

In 1989, the generally peaceful and democratic revolutions in Central and Eastern Europe caught the churches by surprise. They had to face a novel and rapid transition from authoritarian rule to multiparty, pluralistic democracy. Only



Adam Szostkiewicz *is political editor of* Tygodnik Powszechny, *the national Catholic weekly of culture and society, published in Krakow, Poland.*

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in Poland and Czechoslovakia was the Roman Catholic church ready to voice its open support for fundamental change. In the spring of 1989, the Polish Catholic church sent high-ranking representatives to the roundtable talks between the Communist authorities and the democratic opposition to help forge a resolution of the political and social stalemate. In November 1989, Cardinal Frantisek Tomaszek of Prague told crowds of Czechs that he and the entire Catholic church stood on the side of the people.

Religious organizations are tempted to think and act without taking into consideration the rights, expectations, and demands of other segments of society.

Once the euphoria of the peaceful revolution began to fade, however, organized Christianity in Eastern Europe had to face the crucial task of defining its position in a new democratic context. It proved to be a painful and difficult job that required intellectual capabilities hard to find within the existing religious elites.

Despite the varied and complex experience of the last ten years, the general feeling of the journalists, politicians, and academics I know is that this critical task has not been successfully carried out. Popular perception is that organized Christianity in countries like Russia or Poland is still in danger of taking the side of conservative, antimodernizing, nationalist-minded forces. The churches are seen as acting not for a genuine renewal but for securing their own social and political interests. In the former Yugoslavia, efforts at cooperation and reconciliation nothwithstanding, both Roman Catholic and Orthodox Christianity were compromised by ethnic wars and atrocities. In countries where no single religion dominates, the record appears more positive. Thus the Czech Republic, Hungary, and East Germany seem to have produced fewer instances of the abuse of religion for political or chauvinist aims and to have demonstrated more encouraging examples of religion truly serving the common good and acting as a force for moral renewal. Overall, it would be incorrect, in my view, to draw a positive lesson from post-Communist Europe as far as the role of religion is concerned.

The burden of the past, which is the burden of unfreedom, is one of the most important reasons for this. The model of courageous and faithful individuals who witnessed to their faith under Communist persecution does not easily translate into a larger pattern of religion acting as a friend of freedom and liberty for everyone. On the contrary, many once brave religious-minded people have taken sides with the critics of new democratic regimes and with their openness to a variety of ideas and values. The Lithuanian Catholic woman, Nijole Sadunaite, a well-known champion of religious freedom and human rights in Soviet times, attacked the Lithuanian Catholic bishops for not campaigning *against* a post-Communist candidate in a presidential election. A Russian Christian poet, Irina Ratushinskaya, has written that it is easier to suffer than to preach the gospel. Her words may be a warning to those who believed that the end of communism opened the way to an ecumenical pluralism and a mature Christianity.

The absence of any enduring and successful democratic experience can be felt almost every day in the life of post-Communist societies from Poland to Albania. Religious organizations are tempted to think and act without taking into consideration the rights, expectations, and demands of other segments of society. The specter of exclusion and discrimination still haunts our world: Russia's Orthodox church seeks rigorous legal limitations on freedom of religion in the Russian Federation; Polish anti-Semitism still displays itself; and there have been pogroms against the Gypsies in the Czech Republic.

This specter of exclusion rests on the particular concept of nation that continues to dominate. The idea of the nation as a community of free citizens—exercising their rights and liberties and acting together toward a common good based on compromise—has not taken root in Eastern Europe. Rather than a nation of citizens, we have a nation of ancestors. This populist, ethnocentric notion is at odds with the contractual civic conception of the West. This notion helps to explain the atrocities in Croatia, Bosnia, and most recently in Kosovo, as well as the high level of enmity toward ethnic, cultural, and religious minorities who are considered "alien" even after centuries of living in our various countries.

The dominant religion in any one country does almost nothing to rectify this. The wars in the former Yugoslavia cannot be considered wars of religion in the classic sense. Still, to the extent that these atrocities could be defined as wars of faith and be manipulated by politicians on every side, religion can be said to have played an important role. For religion has been a force of division rather than unity, of opposition rather than conciliation. If this does not compromise and undermine religion in society, what does?

When religion is seen as a constitutive and defining factor in a people's identity, there is necessarily a potential for abuse. What post-Communist societies need for their renewal and reconstruction is not more but less religion in the political arena. It would be better for the future of these societies if Christians and people of other religious faiths promoted an agenda of social peace, interreligious dialogue, and cooperation in charitable activities rather than an agenda in which an established religion demands privileges and subsidies. In Poland, nothing has done the Catholic church greater harm than its constant demands for the return of properties confiscated by the Communist regime, its active involve-

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ment in day-to-day politics, and its unwillingness to listen to the arguments against Europe's most restrictive anti-abortion law. Furthermore, the tirades of many leading Catholic churchmen and activists against Europe, the West, the market economy, and pluralism add to the perception of Polish Catholicism as a force fighting the modernization of Poland. The traditional religiosity of popular Polish Catholicism, a source of strength in Communist times, has suddenly and somewhat surprisingly shown its other face: that of a community deeply divided along political lines as well as susceptible to antireformist rhetoric, the reforms of Vatican II included. The Polish pope is a hero and a cult figure in Poland, but his teachings on specific issues, such as the evil of anti-Semitism, are largely ignored.

This is not to deny that there is a certain tension between religion and the modern world. But populist-oriented attacks on the modern age or antiliberal legislation will not resolve this tension. It is only through critical analysis and public debate on the defects and merits of liberal democracy and a market society that a working consensus can be reached. After ten years of democratic experience in post-Communist nations one feels that our societies are still in transition. There is still a great deal of confusion, fear, and ignorance as to the direction we will take.

One of the key issues is coming to terms with the realities of secularization occurring in all pluralist, market-based democracies. The other is the problem of how to understand limits to freedom in a democratic society. Still another is the problem of dealing with the conflicting value systems in an open society. In all these areas of critical importance for a livable future in post-Communist societies, we need a helping hand from the West with its long and rich history of dealing with these central issues.

Religion, of course, has a role to play in this. But what kind of religion? A religion of tribal loyalties and suspicion toward other religions or nonbelievers, or a religion of trust and understanding, good will, self-constraint, and cooperation? A religion of *politique d'abord*, or a religion of charity and care that transcends political, ethnic, and social divisions? A religion of militant defenders, or a religion of peacemakers ready to defend the rights and dignity of every human person regardless of his or her religion, nationality, social status? A religion that cares only for its own interests, or a religion that takes notice of the artifacts of history and culture and the needs of the natural environment, all of which require protection regardless of whom it has served or by whom it was created? A paternalistic, xenophobic, anti-intellectual religion, or a religion willing to face radical change and accommodation without losing its historical and spiritual identity? A religion of "my kingdom is not of this world," or a religion of dominance, wealth, and conformity? Surely, for renewal to happen, restoration must first take place. But after ten years of experience, we see that restoration is not renewal. □

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Richard Alleva

SPOOKY, REALLY SPOOKY

'The Blair Witch Project' & 'The Sixth Sense'

It was supposed to be the summer of *The Phantom Menace* and *Eyes Wide Shut*. Instead, two horror films reigned.

The Blair Witch Project is a stunt that succeeds in being something more than that, but its genre-straddling freakishness would set it apart from all other movies even if it were an artistic failure. Which it isn't.

The movie's prologue tells us we're watching 16mm. footage and video tape discovered in the Black Hills of Maryland where three student filmmakers utterly and mysteriously disappeared. Heather, Josh, and Mike were making a documentary about some crypto-supernatural slaughters that occurred fifty-five years ago. After interviewing townspeople, the kids trooped into the woods to locate the murder site, and their surviving video reveals that they got lost, crumbled psychologically, were (perhaps) stalked by murderous locals and/or supernatural forces, and (perhaps) met their doom in the same place and in the same way that the victims of half a century ago did.

Four genres are here aligned, if not fused:

First, *cinéma vérité*, for, after all, this is supposed to be a documentary shot by a small crew utilizing lightweight equipment. But...

Second, the young documentarians are stalked, terrorized, and, apparently, destroyed. So *Project* also belongs in the disreputable category of Teen-age Stalker-Slasher Bloodfests, à la *Friday the Thirteenth* and *Halloween*. However...

Third, there is no overt bloodshed and the only violence in view is the psychological torture that the characters inflict on each other. Is the supernatural force that is supposedly tracking them just a projection of their own psyches? If so, this would make the movie akin to such ambiguous ghost stories as *The Turn of the Screw* and many works by Walter De La Mare. On the other hand...

Fourth, there is no ambiguity about the protagonists' physical suffering as they wander in the woods. So this puts *The Blair Witch Project* close to such movies as *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*, *Sands of the Kalahari*, and *An Eye for an Eye*, which show human inadequacy writhing in the coils of pitiless nature. Yet all this naturalistic suffering is encircled by a larger, supernatural menace. It's as if uncanny forces were watching these mortals snarling at each other under conditions demanding coolness, stoicism, and compassion. "Ah, they're ripe," the uncanny whispers, then moves in.

If this makes *Project* sound delicately shuddersome, be advised that the movie's style is deliberately roughhewn. This is Henry James meets "60 Minutes." The documentary texture was reinforced by the method of filming. Once the actors, Heather Donahue, Joshua Leonard, and Michael Williams (lending their real first names to their roles), were filled in on their characterizations and storyline, they were given two cameras and told to shoot the movie themselves. The actual writers-directors, Eduardo Sanchez and Daniel Myrick, kept to the sidelines, sometimes even out of sight, in order to promote an atmosphere of harrowing solitude. The performers delivered the goods both technically and emotionally. If atmospheric visuals are out of the question here, the terror of the woods nevertheless reaches us through the despair in the actors' voices.

The movie has two big flaws, one avoidable, the other not. The first was the failure to distinguish the two male characters. (This is a flaw in the scenario, not in the acting.) While Heather is a sharply defined egotist, Mike and Josh seem merely to be taking turns playing loyal follower versus brooding psychopath. Or is this a sociological comment on the emotional inroads of feminism? A woman gets to be Captain Queeg while the males quiver and equivocate?

The other drawback was inevitable since it's merely the flip side of *Project*'s originality. Though the movie runs only seventy-five minutes, it soon begins to grate on your nerves instead of playing upon them. The eye rebels at more than half an hour of hand-held, shaky, bobbing camera work. Vertigo begins to replace dread.

But hang on until the final scene, a truly nightmarish run through (surprise!) a haunted house. Innovations always end up honoring and freshening the hoariest of traditions.

The Sixth Sense has no innovations; it scares the old-fashioned way: You are drawn close to its characters and you jump when they jump. And because the characters are worth coming close to, their frights stay with you long after you leave the theater.

The oddest thing about this horror film is that it doesn't admit its genre

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until it's half over. Till then, the writer-director M. Night Shyamalan seems to be recounting a psychiatric case study of a disturbed boy named Cole, who can surely be cured by his wise psychologist. No ghosts appear until the child confesses to his doctor that "I see dead people." From that point on, the film slides right into the depths of Cole's mind and into his terrors. We see dead people, too.

Yet, the movie is unsettling long before. Cole's mother (wonderful portrait by Toni Collette of an earthy woman nonplussed by unearthliness) leaves Cole at the breakfast table so that she can rinse a bit of spilled food off his tie and turns back ten seconds later to find every cabinet door in the kitchen open and every drawer pulled out while her son still sits quietly munching his cereal. Later, standing in front of his school while all the other children run in for morning classes, Cole might as well be a visitor from another planet. The cameraman, Tak Fujimoto, has sentenced the story's locale, Philadelphia, to an autumn of perpetual mourning, while the director uses the public statues of the City of Brotherly Love as mute witnesses to the boy's fear. *The Sixth Sense* has precisely that feeling of inwardness, of the world being soaked in a character's consciousness, that was so ruinously absent from Kubrick's *Eyes Wide Shut*. In fact, we're drawn close enough to Cole to understand that he is a hero as well as a victim. Though he desperately wants to be rid of his visitations, he tries to shield his mother from knowledge of them out of concern for her. He doesn't want his oddity to ruin her life.

The last half of the story is a journey toward two acts of acceptance. First, Dr. Crowe (Bruce Willis) must persuade the child that what seems to be a curse may turn out to be a gift. This is accomplished not through psychiatric treatment but concrete action when Cole becomes the conduit for a little girl seeking justice from beyond the grave. This eerie and luminous sequence is compounded of equal measures of dread and compassion.

Second, Dr. Crowe, haunted by his failure to save an earlier patient similar to Cole, must accept an astonishing fact about his own existence and his relationship to his wife. This leads to a surprise ending so radical that it may prompt you to see the movie again. (I speak from experience: To see *The Sixth Sense* twice is to see two different movies.)

Though I wish he'd get his hair (or hairpiece) under control, Bruce Willis displays the insinuating power he's capable of whenever he's cast against type. As for Haley Joel Osment as Cole, he's...well, preternatural. I don't know if a ten-year-old can be called a great actor with any certainty, but there's no way so many subtle and precise gradations of emotion could have been evoked strictly by directorial manipulation and clever editing. But if a child pianist can be credited with great technique and emotional insight, why can't an acting prodigy?

The Sixth Sense is both frightening and moving. It is frightening because it is moving. □

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Lift up your art

Theological Aesthetics
God in Imagination, Beauty, and Art
Richard Viladesau
Oxford $49.95, 294 pp.

Daria Donnelly

Pope John Paul II's recent "Letter to Artists" (April 1999) proffers an urgent invitation: "The church needs art." She needs art not so much to illustrate her teachings, but because great art draws us closer to God "by making perceptible...the world of the spirit, of the invisible, of God." That desire to conjoin the visible and invisible, shared by artists and believers, provides a foundation for their renewed and vitalizing alliance. In the words of William Lynch, Jesuit theorist of the Christian imagination: "The Christian faith should never think of itself as a conceptual bundle of ideas which must beg imaginative support from literature and art. This faith is also a life of the imagination—historical, concrete, and ironic. There will, hopefully, never be an end to collaboration between theology and literature, but it must be a collaboration of (theological) imagination with (literary) imagination."

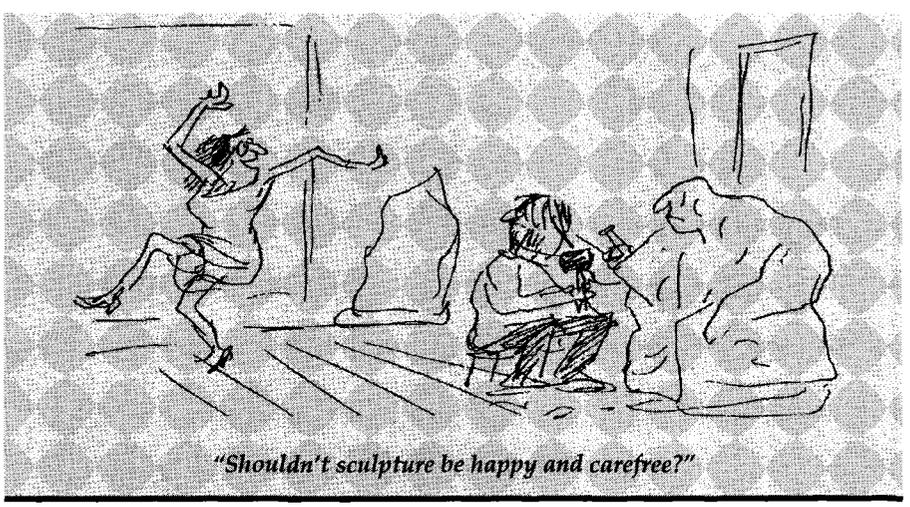
In an effort to bridge the impoverishing divide between contemporary artists and the church, the pope's letter provides a compressed though comprehensible overview of the church's historical collaboration with artists, and her theological understanding of beauty. An extensive exposition of that theology can be found in Fordham professor Richard Viladesau's *Theological Aesthetics: God in Imagination, Beauty, and Art*.

Theological Aesthetics is a work of fundamental theology, which is to say that Viladesau is primarily interested in the sources and warrants for the church's understanding of beauty. Viladesau studies what role aesthetics (knowledge that comes from sensation, imagination, and feeling; the idea of the beautiful; the arts) plays in our understanding of God. His work demonstrates that the role is extensive, rich, and, in part, problematic.

Drawing on Catholic theologians from the fathers of the church to Karl Rahner and David Tracy, and also Protestant theologians Karl Barth and Gerardus Van der Leeuw, Viladesau makes a series of interrelated arguments and affirmations. (1) Beauty, like goodness and truth, is a transcendental, a property that necessarily accompanies being and is found with every being. Thus, beauty is an avenue for the desire and longing which passes back and forth between us and God. (2) Anthropologically speaking, human beings are hardwired to know—to receive God's revelation—through the senses. Through art, be it sacred or secular, we can make a Platonic ascent to God, who is the "condition of possibility" for our appreciation of beauty. (3) The analogical imagination is a genuine form of rationality, and an essential means of understanding God.

This is a crude outline of Viladesau's subtle though sometimes abstruse arguments. Readers are forewarned that *Theological Aesthetics* is difficult. Its principal audience is fellow theologians who are familiar with terms which interested lay readers will have to discover with the aid of a good philosophical dictionary. Less necessarily, Viladesau undervalues syntax as the means of modulating thought, so that he is hard to follow despite abundant section headings and argument summaries.

Nevertheless, I found Viladesau's assertion of the theological importance of the aesthetic bracingly intelligent, though I disagreed with his diagnosis of the dangers posed by the imagination and his advocacy for a "hermeneutic of suspicion" toward art. In his view, the dangers are twofold: idolatry (which occurs when "the analogical becomes mythological," or when "the human imagination substitutes for God's self-revelation"), and distraction ("when the aesthetic function of pleasing takes precedence over the theological function of mediating higher realities or values").



"Shouldn't sculpture be happy and carefree?"

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Despite an appreciation for the truth located within these anxieties, I found myself resisting them on several grounds. First, the term "beauty" is too slippery at the book's end, suddenly signifying a scandalous surfeit and materiality which affronts the social mission of the church. The implied duality between poverty and beauty rings false, and has historically damaged the modern church both in its expression and in its service to the poor.

Similarly unpersuasive is Viladesau's presentation of the Crucifixion as a counter to the seductions of beauty. The cross from which Christ lifts the world to himself might lead an artist as much to extravagance as to asceticism. His advocacy for the latter is understandable, especially given the excesses of our culture and the successes of minimalist sacred art: for example, the Mark Rothko Chapel; Barnett Newman's Stations of the Cross; the current musical triumphs of "the holy minimalists" Arvo Pärt, John Tavener, and Henryk Górecki. But a peek inside your local anorexic church reveals that even asceticism can be vulgarized.

Viladesau gives only three paragraphs to the great problem of contemporary sacred art: the comfortable mediocrity which is abetted by the aesthetic timidity and ignorance of those making decisions about church decoration and liturgy. Viladesau argues that because *kitsch* is religiously helpful for large numbers of the faithful, we should consider it merely as an instance of the "highly subjective component in both aesthetic and religious reactions." This is false populism.

The church today urgently needs bold artists, artists (whether believers or not) who are reckless in their pursuit of artistic purity and perfection. What the French Dominican priest M. A. Couturier wrote in 1951 obtains more than ever in today's image- and commodity-saturated culture. Accused of temerity for his role in what are now understood as among the most significant collaborations between (largely nonbelieving) artists and the church in the twentieth century (Matisse's chapel at Vence, the church decoration of Assy by Léger, Rouault, Matisse, Picasso, and Braque),

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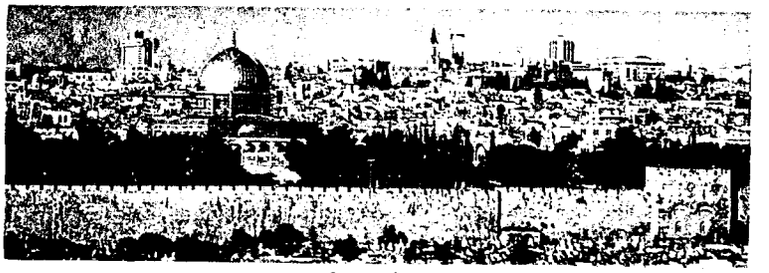

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Couturier responded: "In an age when everyone can read, the primary role of sacred art can no longer be (if indeed it ever was) to instruct. On the contrary, if the same age is precisely the time when the most confining, most crushing servitude weighs upon working people, would not the primary role of art be to create places of enchantment, poetry, deliverance? Please God, may his churches become such places for those who, even though they may not be aware of doing so, still come to church to find what the bitter world never gives them in its houses, its factories, and its barracks!" Add to this: nor its televisions, its superstores, its information superhighway! □

Daria Donnelly, Commonweal*'s children's book critic, lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts.*

NOT ALL BOATS ARE RISING

The New Dollars and Dreams
American Incomes and Economic Change
Frank Levy
The Russell Sage Foundation, $16.95, 248 pp.

The Stakeholder Society
Bruce Ackerman and Anne Alstott
Yale University Press, $26, 296 pp.

Jay Mandle

Between 1949 and 1973 the median family income in the United States rose in real terms from $18,800 to $40,400. At the same time, the distribution of income, though remaining markedly unequal, became more egalitarian. The poorest 20 percent of families increased their share of total family income from 4.5 percent to 5.5 percent. Since then, however, these favorable trends have been halted and family income growth has slowed dramatically. The trend to more equality in the nation's income distribution has been reversed. By 1996 the share of family income received by the poorest 20 percent of families had declined to 4.2 percent, the lowest level since 1949. It is this unsettling experience which motivates both of these books.

Though *The New Dollars and Dreams* is a follow-up to a similar book written by the same author in the mid-1980s and is organized in much the same way as his earlier volume, it is far from a mere revision. In the current effort Levy remains concerned that the economy produces excessively unequal outcomes. But the economic experience since the mid-1980s, and particularly during the 1990s, has been so different from what preceded it that Levy has been forced to broaden his explanation. Earlier, Levy's analysis was that declining productivity growth lay behind what he called "the quiet depression." But today, at a time when *Business Week* celebrates the emergence of a "new economy" fueled by what it describes as a "technology-driven productivity boom," that explanation no longer works. Levy's focus is now less on aggregate growth and more on the importance of what he calls society's "equalizing institutions." Included here are "public and private education, the welfare state, unions, international trade regulations, and the other political structures that blunt the most extreme market outcomes and try to ensure that most people benefit from economic growth." Among these, Levy pays most attention to changing family patterns and what he calls the skill-bias of technological change.

I confess skepticism with regard to the latter. There is no doubt that a widening income gap has emerged between college and high school graduates. This, Levy and most economists have taken to mean that technological change has increased the demand for college-educated workers compared to high school graduates. But at least a plausible alternative explanation is that employers pay a premium for college graduates not for any particular skills that they possess but because employers hold an increasingly negative assessment of the quality and reliability of workers with only a high school diploma. To the best of my knowledge this alternative view has not been rejected on empirical grounds.

Levy insists that his book is economic history, not one intended to recommend corrective policy. Nevertheless he does sketch a set of policies aimed at reversing the trend to inequality. Central to Levy's agenda is education reform. He does not rule out changes in educational policy that "have a strong market flavor." But he urges that an educational choice program "must work in conjunction with academic standards." Such standards, he argues, will "give parents something most parents now lack—information on how the schools are preparing their children for the labor market." Beyond this, Levy urges changes in the welfare state. He agrees, for example, with at least some of the criticisms that were made of Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), musing that "a disinterested observer would indeed have to wonder whether AFDC was reducing inequality or making it worse." But at the same time he writes favorably about earned-income tax credits, refundable child credits for low-income families, enforcement of child support from absent fathers, greater availability of medical care for low-income persons, and the use of the public sector for employment creation in economic downturns.

Levy's support for the basic social provision provided by the welfare state is the fundamental issue which puts him at odds with the authors of *The Stakeholder Society*. Ackerman and Alstott, like Levy, are concerned with the growing maldistribution of income and report disapprovingly on the "indisputable fact that almost all of our newfound abun-

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dance has gone to the top 20 percent." But their provocative proposal to endow each individual at age eighteen with $80,000, to be used as each person chooses, is not intended primarily to address that fact. At best it does so indirectly, because their principal objective is to secure equality of opportunity and to do so with an approach whose impact is "to break the hold of a familiar vision of the welfare state in America." They write "our first concern is not with safety nets but with starting points; not with misfortune, but with opportunity; not with welfare, but with economic citizenship." It is not as if Ackerman and Alstott wish to do away with all safety nets. Their proposal does include a universal retirement system, albeit one set at a minimal level. As they put it, "we are interested in opportunities, not outcomes."

It is their underlying objectives, and not the political feasibility or unexamined macroeconomic consequences of their scheme, by which Ackerman and Alstott's proposal should be evaluated. They declare that "as liberals, we believe that each citizen should be free to shape her outcomes as she thinks best." In this the authors offer a reconceptualization of redistributionist goals. They believe that the $80,000 stake they offer each person has allowed them to transcend the dichotomy between collectivism and individualism. Their program, they write, is "based on the community's obligation to give each person equal respect by providing her with equal resources to develop her unique talents."

But in their desire to accommodate, if not co-opt, American individualism and to de-emphasize the role of social safety nets, Ackerman and Alstott go too far. They write that all adults make mistakes and when those occur "churches and other institutions of civil society should play a leading part in helping people in trouble," leaving the state to play a "backup role." Acknowledging that this will result in a relatively low level of assistance, they nonetheless write, "it is a hard call, but one that must be made: it is more important to ensure that all Americans enjoy more equal freedom to shape their lives than to give more generous relief to those who fail the test of freedom."

I believe that the position adopted by Ackerman and Alstott, that success or failure in life is largely in the hands of individuals themselves, is exaggerated. Particularly in an age of globalization, where economic restructuring and reconfiguration daily become more rapid, dislocations are the norm. Individuals in such circumstances are principally the objects, not the agents, of life changes. As such they should be provided with support to allow them to adjust and thrive in new circumstances. To insist to the contrary and not to place a priority on supporting and retraining the victims of progress represents a loss of opportunity which is costly not only to the individuals but to the society as a whole.

Increased equality in opportunity is the principle which motivates *The Stakeholder Society* and that is a desirable goal. But whatever success is achieved in this way, it will still be necessary for social policy to do more than affirm that "some will succeed and others fail, but all will have had a real chance at the pursuit of happiness." In this regard, therefore, Levy is closer to what is needed than Ackerman and Alstott. Their liberalism, no matter how well funded, lacks sufficient active compassion for those hurt by forces larger than themselves. □

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THE BAD WOLF RETURNS

While I Was Gone
A Novel
Sue Miller
Alfred A. Knopf, $24, 266 pp.

Suzanne Keen

Ever since Victorian novelists made realistic fiction into a serious form for the study of imagined lives and their likely patterns, novelists who dip for ingredients into the richer, older stock of fairy-tale storytelling run the risk of seeming sensational, improbable, and even untrue. Having made a career writing realistic fiction about women's lives, Sue Miller in her latest novel bursts through the confines of those stories in which we know what will happen next, rupturing the ordinary, everyday world of her narrator Jo Becker with a set of sensational memories of a time when she lived a radically different life under an assumed name.

Miller works hard in *While I Was Gone* to keep her fairy tale tethered to recognizable landmarks in and around Cambridge, Massachusetts: Boston-area readers will not be disappointed by her evocation of place, which has always been a strong suit in her work. But in *While I Was Gone* the moral fabulist shows through, as revelations, confessions, and discoveries about the past translate into wounds in the present. The idea that a nasty secret gains power when, exposed to the present, it gets a fresh crop of victims, belongs to the related genres of horror, gothic, and fairy tale. Realistic fiction ordinarily endorses remembering as a psychological necessity for healing to occur. *While I Was Gone* shows that knowing the truth may satisfy a reader's desire for a full story, but as far as the characters go, knowledge itself cannot heal the ruptures created by seeking it.

In *While I Was Gone*, a grown-up married woman, Jo Becker, meets a man (Eli) from a time long past. They shared a communal household broken up by the murder of one of the housemates. The memories of that time, and the questions that arise about their murdered friend

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Dana, provoke Jo to draw too close to Eli. She risks her good life of the present day: Will her marriage survive? This summary of *While I Was Gone*, because it sticks to the realistic details, omits the elements that make the story an original and compelling fiction. For this to come through, I give you the fairy-tale version, which Miller disguises in the clothes of realism.

Once upon a time there was a girl who deliberately disappeared. She left her parents and her first husband in the dark. She changed her name: she boldly named herself Felicia Stead, "Happiness Instead." Perhaps this was a mistake of hubris, suggesting that she could choose her fate. She found a room in a house full of fascinating people, none more intense and provocative than the lovely Dana, until Felicia's arrival the only woman in the household. Here Felicia Stead avoided some dangers at the cost of putting herself in the way of other hazards, as fairy-tale form dictates. She came home one day to her haven and found the beautiful Dana dead in a pool of blood.

An ordeal follows, then escape into a new life (a good life) and yet another identity formed as Jo Becker. Because the girl is in a fairy tale and is by now surely a woman, she sees that her third choice must be her true and best choice, and thus she happily lives, a veterinarian with her minister husband, until the day when Eli, a housemate from the time "while she was gone," shows up. In the realistic novel that seemingly surrounds the woman, this can only be called a coincidence, but those who have not lost sight of the fairy tale (or their Freud) will recognize the bogeyman, the revenant, the return of the repressed. In vain the reader calls out: don't go back into those woods with that man, for the story demands that she will, and the readers (bloodthirstily curious) will also want to know what really happened all those years ago.

The novel then tells the story of the murder and the investigation as Jo Becker pursues the unanswered questions during her flirtation with Eli. Sue Miller exposes the impulsive self inside Jo Becker, usually kept under control, a self that jeopardizes her marriage for the sake of answering old questions and reliving old traumas experienced as Felicia Stead. If readers have a hard time keeping track of all the versions of Jo Becker mentioned in this review, they should rest assured that Miller's character also ponders the problem of knowing who she is and what story line she ought to be living out. The temptation to recapture a plot-line in which anything is possible and nothing predictable arises from Jo Becker's identification with the dead Dana, a character she remakes in bedtime stories of "Miraculotta," a superheroic girl who can do anything she desires. Jo's recovered connection with Eli, who remembers both the murdered Dana and Jo under her alias "Felicia Stead," ironically drives Jo into two of the most conventional stories told by realistic novels, "adultery," and "seduction and betrayal."

Miller uses her character's appetite for variety to present a confrontation between the excitements of fairy tales and the comforts and discomforts of domestic realism: either way, Jo Becker cannot escape the conventional. Miller's unusual skill shows when she introduces in her murder story the ingredients of thrillers, detective fiction, and police procedurals, but then resolutely turns away from their plot lines and solutions in favor of a plainer and more ordinary-looking goal, depicting the character as she confronts her own frailties and her mortality. Miller is less interested in the psycho-killer and more interested in the regular characters' fascination with him. Unlike P. D. James and Ruth Rendell, who probe the psychology of their killers and misfits, Miller takes the encounter with evil as an opportunity to represent a crisis almost any reader can imagine experiencing: alienation from our present selves and lives. It is a rare person who feels no wonderment at the gap between our younger selves and the selves we have become. The challenge to our sense of continuity and wholeness can be discomforting to contemplate: In the novel the rift is worsened by Jo's identification with the dead Dana, a theme she explores through bedtime stories told to one of her daughters. The interwoven subplot about the just-barely-grown daughters who make their separate ways home during the story reminds the reader that any consequences of the mother's actions will be experienced differently, and no less formatively, by the young whose adult selves are just taking shape.

While I Was Gone suggests that remembering, even the kind that seeks truth, can be overpraised. Handling in plain style the material and incidents of a traumatic memory brought unexpectedly into view, Miller adds up the tax on human relationships that comes with absorption in the past. Miller's patient depiction of Jo's husband, Daniel, minister and comforter of the bereaved, sets Jo's heady sensation of desiring a story whose outcome is not yet known in its true context, her knowledge of her mortality: "when we do know what will happen next. And next and next, and then last." The character most tormented by Jo's obsession with Dana and Eli, Daniel, offers in a eulogy a powerful definition of the proper place of remembering: After loss brings pain, which triggers memory, "itself a living metaphor for the eternal life," memory "rises within each of us by the grace of God." By contrast, the transcendent goal of this kind of memory makes Jo's obsession with the past seem damaging, circling as it does around the goal of laying blame. □

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Suzanne Keen, *a frequent contributor, teaches English literature at Washington and Lee University in Lexington, Virginia.*

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RELIGION BOOKNOTES

Lawrence S. Cunningham

The topic of Paul Griffiths's latest book has been much on my mind of late. I've been thinking of ways to get students to read theological texts in a more "contemplative" manner so that they allow the texts to read back or speak to them. This is no easy task because students are so habituated to the passive intake of highly charged visual bits coming from the television or computer screen. Such passivity does not work very well when one is trying to learn the meaning of a passage of Scripture or the subtle line of thought in a question from the *Summa.*

Religious Reading: The Place of Reading in the Practice of Religion
by Paul Griffiths
Oxford University Press, $35, 210 pp.

Griffiths has a far more polemical take on the problem of reading. He argues (in his last chapter, he thunders!) that the academic literature produced in the field of religion is "consumerist," having no sense of how reading functions within a religious tradition. Reading itself, he says, should be a central religious practice. The burden of his tightly argued book, which uses examples from both Buddhism and Christianity, is to show that reading is central to religious faith and to explain in detail how this literature is constructed, materially and intellectually, within religious traditions. The distinction between "religious" and "consumerist" reading may be too sharp since the reasons for and ways in which people read have varied, and do, greatly, as Alberto Manguel has shown in *A History of Reading* (1996).

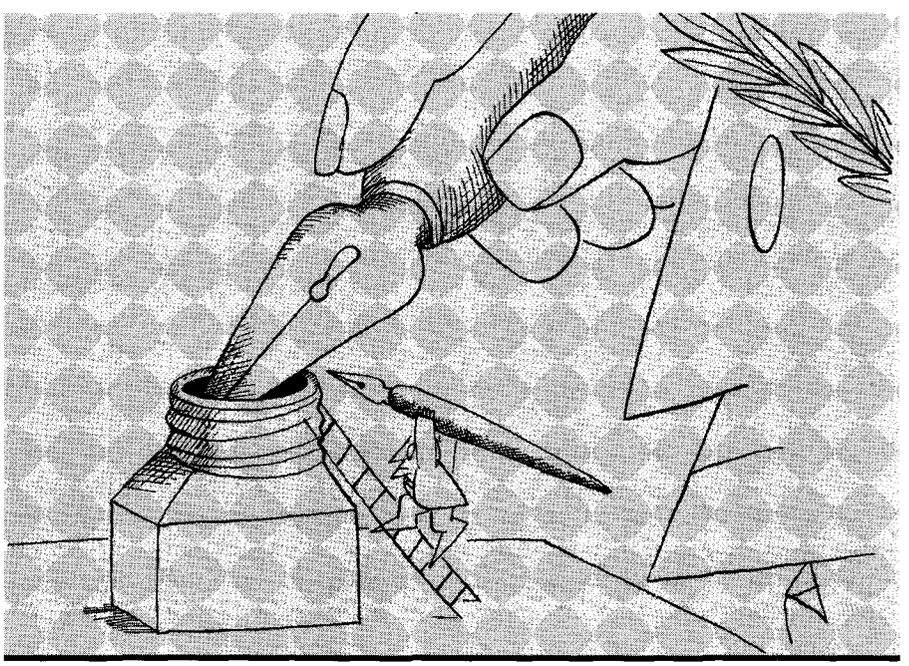
In his conclusion, Griffiths insists that there should be room in the academy for traditional practitioners of authentic religious reading. In other words, there ought to be space made for pundits and rabbis. Griffiths is sophisticated enough to realize that (a) this is unlikely to happen, and that (b) the paradoxical nature of his arguments rests in the uncomfortable fact that he (like myself and others) produces yards of "consumerist" literature in the field of religion.

Griffiths has done an immense amount of reading on the place of books and readers in the history of religion. His chapters on test cases are immensely learned but, in the case of Buddhism, demanding for the nonexpert. Oddly, the chapters on the fundamental genres of religious reading, which he sees as commentaries and anthologies, exclude the most fundamental genre of all: the sacred book, from which commentaries and anthologies spring. But how does one sharply distinguish his two categories? The medieval glossed Bible is a case in point. The glossed Bible had, at its core, the sacred book(s) about which countless pages of commentary are anthologized. Moreover, Griffiths does not pay sufficient attention to the question of how the very perception of a page radically changes over time, a change wonderfully explicated in Ivan Illich's compelling but insufficiently noticed *In the Vineyard of the Text* (1993).

There is much wonderful information in this book and it is very ably written. In fact, one can come away from it less pessimistic about the academy than the author, while still hoping that the old tradition of religious reading will continue to thrive in institutions apart from the academy. The best service this book provides is to highlight the vast need for critical reflection on the act of reading.

We are on the cusp of a revolution in communication as far-reaching as that inaugurated by the invention of movable type in the fifteenth century. Walter Ong, among others, has been making that argument for some time. The merit of Griffiths's book is that he brings much of this argument to bear on the work of the academy as it pursues what is commonly called "religious studies."

The word "mysticism" is of modern coinage, but the term "mystical theology" has an ancient pedigree. Traditionally, the adjective "mystical" meant "hidden." For instance, the ancient fathers and biblical commentators looked for that which was hidden under the plain sense of Scripture (accessible only to those who read "religiously" and not as consumers—to borrow Griffiths's distinction). More technically, "mystical theology" was the unutterable reality that always stood beyond whatever one might say about God. The sixth-century Syri-



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an monk Dionysius wrote *Mystical Theology* as a counterpoint to his earlier work listing and describing the meaning of *The Names of God*. Mystical theology, then, stood as shorthand for the attempt to articulate what finally could not be said of the divine mystery as opposed to those positive things—albeit by analogy—that could be said of God. As Hans Urs von Balthasar noted, the positive and the mystical must be read dialectically.

Mystical Theology
by Mark McIntosh
Blackwell, $26.95, 246 pp.

Mark McIntosh, in this excellent study, understands that classical sense of the term "mystical theology" so well he makes the perceptive remark that the phrase meant the experience of the utter mystery of God rather than a mystic's own experience. To grasp that distinction is to understand that much of the contemporary philosophical inquiry into the nature of the mystic's experience—is it pure consciousness? mediated through religious categories? ineffable? noetic?—is a category mistake. Mystical theology has to do with the reality of God, not primarily with a mystic's "experience."

If mystical theology has to do with the experience of the mystery of God, then spirituality (I use the shorthand term) cannot be bracketed off from theology. Indeed, the fundamental argument of McIntosh's book is that there was no distinction between theology and spirituality for a long period in the church's history. The divorce of spirituality and theology has been in the process of healing at the hands of theologians like Karl Rahner and Hans Urs von Balthasar, McIntosh writes. A new integration of theology is highly desirable, according to McIntosh, who offers strategies for enhancing theological discourse through a recovery of the tradition of mystical theology. Basic to this line of argument is McIntosh's conviction that spirituality is about "the activity of being drawn into an encounter with the other." That emphasis on relationality allows McIntosh to assay positive constructions of everything from a new way of thinking about trinitarian theology to new angles from which one might think about ethics.

There is an enormous amount of popular writing on spirituality on the market today. I wrote "on the market" because a fair slice of such writing fits so neatly into our consumerist culture. McIntosh's book does not fit into that niche; in fact, he is, rightly, suspicious of most of it. This work is not for the theologically timid. He presumes some acquaintance with the tradition, argues with theological acuity, and is solidly orthodox in his Christian affirmations. This is an important work which heralds what I hope will be more serious attempts to marry real theological learning to committed Christian praxis.

Studies on biblical Christology appear with great frequency. Some are highly technical while others are more inclined to the devotional. Some authors, and I would number Frank Matera as one of them, have the knack of absorbing the work of sophisticated scholarship and transmitting that learning in a readable and spiritually nourishing manner.

New Testament Christology
by Frank Matera
Westminster John Knox, $26, 304 pp.

The merit of Matera's work rests precisely in his approach, which is to read the text as a narrative and in the canonical shape it has in the Bible while paying attention to the way(s) in which the biblical writer describes, professes, and reflects upon the figure of Christ. He accomplishes this by asking some fundamental questions: What is the relationship of Jesus to God the Father? How did the biblical writers understand the paschal mystery of Christ's passion, death, and Resurrection? What significance, weight, and intention did the writers give to the many titles of Jesus? He treats the whole of the New Testament in light of these central issues. As the book concludes, he argues that despite the quite different trajectories of the individual works in the canon, there is a unity in the diversity of the Christologies discussed.

In the introduction Matera states that one of his aims is to help theology students take more seriously and centrally the data of Scripture. In that sense, he undertakes a great task in contemporary theology, namely, to overcome the chasm that can develop between professional exegesis and theological reflection. Since the book is clearly written, thorough, and well organized, it would make a nice companion volume for a mature biblical study group or for classroom use.

In the Footsteps of Jesus: 2000 Years Later
by Wolfgang Pax
Continuum, $29.95, 224 pp.

Pax's book, according to the dust jacket, sold a million copies in its first edition, which saw light nearly thirty years ago. My guess would be that many of those copies were sold to pilgrims in the Holy Land. Pax, a Franciscan, knows that place well. His easy-to-read narrative about the sites is illustrated with some one hundred and forty crisp photographs of churches, shrines, and holy places. The photographic emphasis is on the many Latin rite churches, which stand over the putative places associated with the biblical story of Jesus.

The "coffee table" format makes it an attractive gift or souvenir for someone who either has been or plans to go on pilgrimage. The author intertwines a kind of running narrative of the gospel story with side glances toward archaeological discoveries and historical observations. A large number of the illustrations are interior views of Latin churches in various locations. The interiors, mostly modern, are hardly distinguished examples of Christian art or architecture.

Were I editing this volume I would have insisted on a few more user-friendly elements. At a minimum there should have been a brief bibliography of more detailed guide books (like the authoritative *The Holy Land* [Oxford University Press, 1998] by Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, O.P.), a few maps to orient the reader, and, finally, an index. Pax's book is attractive but it is more souvenir than reliable guide.

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Jesus Christ: The Jesus of History, the Christ of Faith
by J.R. Porter
Oxford University Press, $35, 240 pp.

Porter's book is done in the same large format, with 160 color illustrations, 20 black-and-white illustrations, and 20 maps. He does not cover the pilgrimage sites in the same manner as Pax, though he does explain the land, culture, religious customs, and geography in accessible detail. The book has five large sections: the setting of the life of Jesus; the life of Jesus; his teachings; interpretations of Jesus; and Jesus in art. A glossary of terms, a list of abbreviations, a basic bibliography, and an index are provided.

To show how this book works, I will choose, from many possibilities, Porter's brief discussion on the synagogue in the time of Jesus (under "Setting"). Porter provides a photo of the synagogue remains of Bar'am in the Galilee which is built over the archaeological remains of the synagogue which Jesus may have entered. He then discusses the place of the synagogue in the life of the Jews during the time of Jesus. In a boxed feature in the same chapter there is a brief outline of the cycle of Jewish festivals, which is illustrated by a fifteenth-century Italian panel painting of Jesus at the Last Supper. Indeed, one of the hallmarks of this book is its use of classic works of art to illustrate the topics at hand. None of the chapters (if that is what they should be called) is longer than two pages, but with the boxes that provide ancillary information, a great deal of learning is packed into these pages.

It struck me that were this fine book to appear in a somewhat less expensive edition it would make a nice companion volume for a study group or even a beginning college course on the New Testament. It provides solid information and is a feast for the eyes, a beauty made evident by the high quality of the visual materials on every page of the text. □

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THE PROMISED LAND

Jake Halpern

Our bus has inch-thick, tinted, bullet-proof windows, which make our journey through the West Bank both quiet and dim. We take a tunnel beneath the Palestinian-controlled city of Bethlehem to avoid stone throwers or other trouble, and stop briefly in the walled-in Jewish enclave of Kiryat Arba. Pulling into the old town square in Hebron, I sense that we have arrived at the front line.

I have caught the ride to Hebron on a tour bus with an entourage of American Orthodox Jews who are making a religious pilgrimage. Our guide is David Wilder, a fortyish former American who is the spokesman for the embattled Jewish community in Hebron. I am here to interview Wilder, but first we embark on a walking tour of Hebron's scattered Jewish neighborhoods. Being a secular Jew, I stick to the back of the tour, unsure whether I am comfortable or even welcome.

The streets of Hebron have an eerie and ubiquitous tension about them, as if at any moment trouble might erupt. The place is infused with a strange mix of religious fundamentalism and Wild West gunslinging. There are men in white turbans—members of the Muslim group, Hamas—standing poised on street corners, religious Jews walking past, holsters and pistols on their belts, nineteen-year-old Israeli soldiers operating roadblocks, and masses of seemingly unperturbed Palestinians busy shopping at a market protected by a stone-proof mesh canopy.

The highlight of our tour—and the centerpiece of Hebron—is the enormous shrine that sits above the town's square. The shrine was built above the "Cave of Machpelah" where Abraham the Patriarch is buried. Over the last thousand years it has served as a temple, a mosque, a church, and a monastery. Today most of the tensions in Hebron revolve around this tomb.

Abraham is revered as the forefather of both the Jewish and the Muslim peoples, and both hold his tomb sacred. Over the centuries there has been an ongoing feud over who should control the tomb and the shrine that sits above it. Currently the shrine is divided evenly into a synagogue and a mosque. This partition was installed in 1994, after an Israeli named Baruch Goldstein, dressed in his military uniform, entered the mosque and opened fire on Muslims at prayer, killing twenty-nine.

When I visit the Jewish half of the shrine, I am drawn into one of its inner chambers by the sound of crying and howling. After making my way through the second metal detector, I enter a small room where I see a man praying before an open Torah in an emotional outpouring, spitting and trembling. I stand here at the very epicenter of Hebron's intensity, gaping at this man with another tour member, a teen-ager. Though the teen-ager is Orthodox himself, he seems more shocked than I am, and when we leave the tomb he exclaims, "I never knew Jews prayed like that."

On the street outside the tomb, as I wait for the other members of the tour to finish their prayers, I talk with our other guide, a woman who lives in Jerusalem but likes to come to Hebron on weekends. She introduces herself as "Rose," a Canadian from Montreal, but quickly insists that I call her by her Hebrew name, "Haiya." Upon discovering that I am Jewish, she reveals that the turmoil in Hebron is really the result of Jews not being observant enough. "God is punishing us," she tells me. When I ask her what the best-case scenario for the future is, she answers, "the coming of the Messiah," and then laughs.

David Wilder, on the other hand, strikes me as surprisingly practical. A thin, soft-spoken man with a graying beard, he looks thoroughly tired. "There are a hundred thousand Arabs here in Hebron, and just five hundred Jews," he tells me, and then pauses, as if this were all that need be said. He reiterates that the situation in Hebron is messy, but that the Jews of Hebron are committed to peaceful coexistence with the Arab population. "We want peace, but we're not leaving," he says. "We're here to stay."

This pledge spells out the dilemma most clearly to me when I sit in the office of Mustafa Natshe, the mayor of Palestinian Hebron. Natshe, a well dressed man with a few combed-back white hairs, tells me that there will never be peace in Hebron until the Jewish settlers leave. What's worse, according to him, is that most of the settlers are immigrants from the United States. In fact, I have not been in Hebron long before I meet my first American settler, Sarah Niskin. A native of Florida, she graduated from high school two years ago and now lives in Hebron. She is quite "lucky" to be here, she says, because space is so scarce. Wilder himself moved to Hebron only this year (from Kiryat Arba) when a rabbi was murdered and one of the community's few apartments opened up. "They won't let us build," Wilder tells me. By "they," he means the Israeli government.

As our tour group—flanked by Israeli soldiers and receiving curious looks from Palestinians and settlers alike—walks along a trash-littered street, the tomb of Abraham again comes into view. I have not noticed, but I am walking next to Haiya. "I find it so refreshing to come here," she says. □

Jake Halpern, *a graduate of Yale, is a research reporter at the* New Republic.

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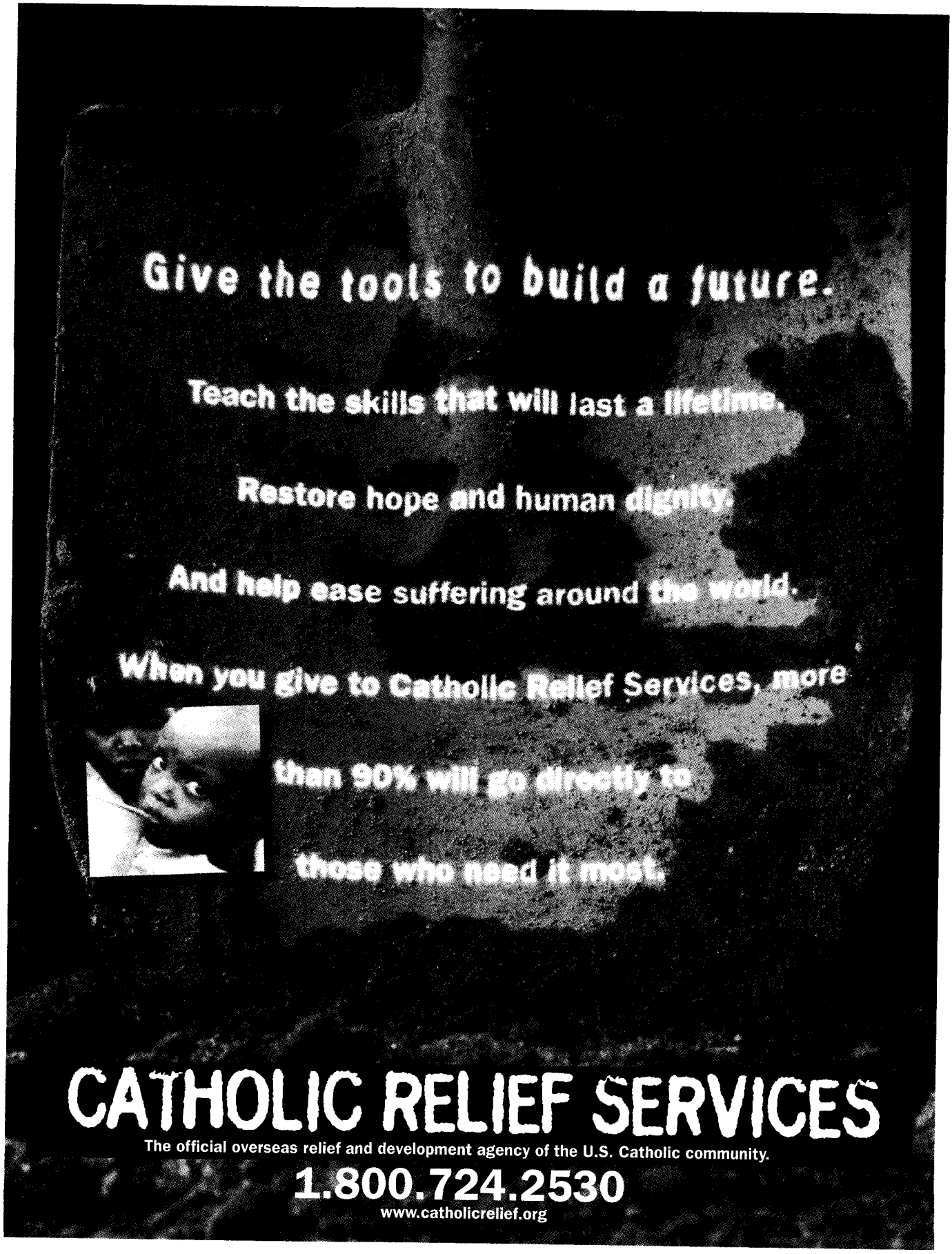
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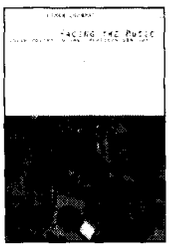

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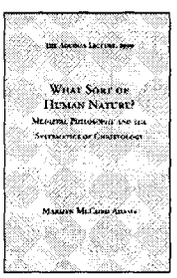

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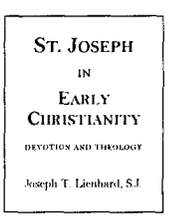

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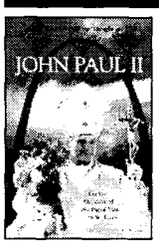

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